

THE
ORIGINAL
OF THE
MINIATURE.

A NOVEL.

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OF THE
MINIATURE.

A Novel.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY SELINA DAVENPORT,

*AUTHOR OF THE HYPOCRITE, OR MODERN JANUS, THE SONS OF
THE VISCOUNT AND DAUGHTERS OF THE EARL, DONALD
MONTEITH, &c. &c.*

" Too faithful heart! thou never canst retrieve
Thy wither'd hopes : conceal the cruel pain ;
O'er thy lost treasure still in silence grieve,
But never to the unseling ear complain :
From fruitless struggles dearly bought refrain ;
Submit at once—the bitter task resign,
Nor watch and fan th'expiring flame in vain."

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THE
Original of the Miniature.

CHAPTER I.

THE heart of Virginia, surcharged as it was with grief, could not admit of her wearing the exterior of ease. Lady Deterville also laboured evidently under a depression of spirits, which not even the presence of her favourite could dissipate. "I met with two unpleasant things this morning, my dear Virginia," said she, "which have put me a little out of humour. First I received a letter from the earl, to say that he regrets not being able to be in town to attend

me to Mrs. Trelawny's masked ball, but that I may certainly expect him two days after."

"I hope, my dear countess, that the return of the worthy earl did not contribute to your low spirits; for my part, I shall rejoice to see him once more do the honours of his table; he is so kind, so friendly, and so anxious to make every one of his guests feel themselves at home."

Lady Deterville blushed painfully. "True, my love, but I have been so extravagant lately, and have lost so much money at play, that I fear to encounter his reproaches, because I feel that I deserve them. My second vexation followed close upon my first. I drove to madame Lindamire, to give orders for a new dress for the duchess of M——'s rout. As I entered I met Mrs. Reuben Glendore and Alicia, who were just quitting the shew-rooms. Instead of the usual familiar inquiries, they courtesied

tesied to me with a coldness so distant, so freezing, so unexpected, that I scarce believed the evidence of my eyes; and they actually passed me without speaking. To no one but yourself and lady Elizabeth would I own how much this singular conduct has grieved me. But these haughty commoners shall not exult in their fancied greatness. On Wednesday evening we meet again; they shall then find that the countess of Deterville can look and act as if they had never before met her sight. What could possess such a fine young man as Reuben Glendore to marry a woman with no other recommendation than her riches?"

"Amiable and gentle," replied Virginia, "he yielded, I believe, more to the wishes of his family, at least to a part of it, than to those of his own heart."

"Ah, poor fellow! and has he too been sacrificed at the shrine of ambition? Perhaps in secret he cherishes the re-

4 ORIGINAL OF THE MINIATURE.

membrance of one who, but for his rash marriage, might have made the world an Elysium to him."

"No, no," hastily exclaimed Virginia, "the mind of Reuben will never wander from his duty. He is the best of sons, of brothers, and of husbands, and I hope that Dorinda will never forget the value of that heart of which she is now become mistress."

"I hope not, for *his sake*," replied the beautiful countess, "and I should care very little about the saucy airs of his wife, were she not the sister-elect of my beloved Virginia. I shall be most cruelly disappointed, my dear girl, should any unforeseen circumstance prevent your attending her grace's party."

Virginia, who had no reserves from the countess, now repeated to her that part of Alicia's conversation respecting the stranger, and concluded by saying that she felt a presentiment that this gentleman

gentleman was in possession of the information she had so long sought to obtain.

Lady Deterville had always endeavoured to repress the painful curiosity of her fair friend, from a secret fear that, if gratified, it might only render her unhappy, and she now tried all her eloquence to induce her to desist from her purposed inquiry. "It is with real concern, my Virginia," said she, "that I see you still bent on an investigation which can only increase your perplexity. You have every reason to imagine that your parents lived together on no very friendly terms. The removal of your mother's picture from the frame which contained that of your father, his prejudice against yourself, and the deep-rooted dislike, which even in his last moments he showed towards you, may have been caused by circumstances which, if known to you, would only wound your delicacy, as well as your filial tenderness."

“Gracious Heaven!” exclaimed Virginia, looking with pale astonishment on the countess, “what is it that you suspect? Instead of allaying my curiosity, you have more keenly excited it. Ah!” said she, no longer able to restrain her tears, “I begin to view the conduct of my father in a new light. Should my fears be verified, I am wretched beyond relief. Notwithstanding this conviction, I cannot remain in ignorance. My peace of mind, at all events, is destroyed. I would not for the world miss seeing sir Charles Blandford on Wednesday, though the loss of life were the consequence.”

Lady Deterville’s tenderness by degrees composed the fever of Virginia’s spirits, and it was agreed that the countess should breakfast next morning with her friend, and then accompany her to call on Mrs. Herbert. Contrary to their expectations, they were now joined by sir David Montgomery, who had been
dining

dining with lord de Morville and a large party of officers, but, aware of the intended visit of Virginia, had left them abruptly, not however before he had drank sufficient to make him what is generally termed elevated. His presence was a seasonable relief to the two friends, who, after much entreaty, consented to go with him to see a favourite ballet at the opera.

It was late before they arrived, and the house was uncommonly crowded, but the countess had a box of her own, into which sir David, with rather an unsteady hand, conducted his sister and Virginia. Placing himself between them, he drew upon himself the attention of several persons in the pit beneath him, by the loudness of his voice, and the theatrical air of his attitudes, while Virginia blushed and felt confused at perceiving that his pointed behaviour towards herself included her in the general notice. The manly beauty of sir

David's person, and the loveliness of both his companions, soon drew all eyes towards the box of the countess.

"My dear David," said she, in a whisper, "speak lower; you distress our sweet friend. Herbert and his sister have just entered the opposite box. I see by the gravity of his looks that his surprise at beholding Virginia is by no means an agreeable one."

Sir David rapidly turned his head, and bowed towards the offended lover, but Arthur coldly returned his civility, while Dorinda purposely avoided looking that way, but laughed and chatted with her brother or Alicia, secretly resolved not even to notice Virginia while in the company of lady Deterville.

Virginia, hurt by her unkindness, and deeply mortified by the coldness of Herbert, sat for the remainder of the performance a silent and inattentive spectator. Her white arm supported her pale and beautiful countenance, and her
eyes

eyes were fixed vacantly on the stage, while her thoughts were full of far different objects. Unconsciously she gave her hand to sir David, who led her to the carriage, which by her desire set her down in St. James's Place.

At home, she threw herself on a couch in the drawing-room, and gave way to tears of wounded affection and conscious error. Mrs. Meredith and Winifred had retired to bed, not expecting her to return till a much later hour, and Virginia was consequently left alone to all the poignancy of grief. It was now that she felt that the pleasures of the world are but fleeting and unsubstantial joys—it was now that she reverted once again to the scenes of her early childhood. “Had the health of Marian Glendore permitted her to have continued my companion and counsellor,” thought Virginia, “I should never have experienced the humiliations of this evening ;

and had not my fatal vanity lost me the heart of her brother, the purse-proud Dorinda would not have gloried in her conquest, nor have ventured to insult the constancy of a friendship which she is incapable of feeling. Ah me, what a fate is mine! Who shall dare affirm that even *now* I may become the wife of Arthur?" She paused—the probability of having forfeited his esteem, by her obstinate attachment to the falling fortunes of lady Deterville, for a time deprived her of breath. She leaned for support against the couch; her head rested on the pillow, and tears of real agony streamed down her face. The door opened, and Herbert, pale and agitated, entered the apartment.

"My own adored Virginia," said he, pressing her wildly to his bosom, "my beloved, my affianced bride, why do I see you thus? Has that mysterious stranger dared to breathe into your ear a hint,

hint, a word which could alarm your delicacy? Speak, my sweetest, dearest Virginia."

Virginia raised her head from the bosom of her lover. She saw every handsome feature quivering with secret anger, and she hastened to allay it by telling him the real cause of her distress. Again she felt herself strained to the beating heart of Herbert, who, as he imprinted on her soft lips the impassioned kiss of tenderest affection, betrayed the unguarded weakness of excessive love.

"Fear not, most adored Virginia," said he, "the continuance of my displeasure. Circumstances may break my heart, but it can never love you less. I may deplore the fatal connexion which seems destined not only to destroy the peace, but to endanger the life of de Morville, and with it to sully the pure name of his sister; I may sigh to behold her friends one by one drop her acquaintance, because she is the *clève* of

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lady Elizabeth Lester, and the companion of the countess of Deterville; nay, I may myself be forced openly to condemn that singular attachment which can brave the public opinion, and even reject the advice of a heart like mine, a heart which, torn and bleeding as it is by recent wounds, still fondly clings to its long-cherished idol. Virginia! should fate at last have doomed that I should be compelled to resign all right to this beloved hand, swear that you will never allow this ring to give place to another!"

Virginia, more dead than alive, blinded by tears, and choaked by sobs, with difficulty articulated the oath required by her lover. "You alarm me," said she, "beyond measure. Dearest Arthur, what has happened since I saw you at the opera? what has occasioned this terrible agitation, these singular fears? I know that I am a sad thoughtless girl, unworthy of a noble heart like thine; but my faults, such as they are, I never
wished

wished to conceal from your knowledge.”

“Dearest, loveliest Virginia! candour such as this atones for youthful levity. Oh, my adored! I will not yet despair. Should I be permitted still to call you mine, my unabating tenderness shall supply to you the fascinating society of lady Deterville. To-morrow night, my Virginia, I shall reach Bath. Business of importance, on which the future happiness of my life depends, leads me to Mr. Glendore. I may be compelled to remain a day with him, but you may expect me without fail on the night of the third.”

“To Bath! to Mr. Glendore! ah Heaven! and may I not ask the cause of your sudden journey? may I not know what mysterious stranger you allude to? Am I not your affianced wife? and have I not some claim on your confidence?”

“Yes, my Virginia, the strongest, dearest of claim; but why should I
wound

wound your feelings, why repeat to you words which have awakened all my dormant horrors, when they may still have no foundation?"

"Because if you love me, Arthur, you will ease the tortures I now endure. I feel that some terrible event is approaching, that my trials have begun. My heart has a secret foreboding that your visit bears a reference to my family, and that Mr. Glendore, perhaps, is in possession of its secrets. Perhaps," and she hid her face in the bosom of Herbert, "perhaps he may disclose to you the cause of my father's aversion—of my mother's——"

Shame tied her tongue, and she would have fainted but for the passionate embrace of Arthur.

"Virginia! idol of my bursting heart! no longer can I conceal from you my fears. You ought to have sooner known the whole of my father's singular bequest. Any thing is to be preferred to
what

what you now suffer; and for my sake you will strive to await with patience my application."

He now drew from his pocket the letter of the governor to himself, with that which he had secretly taken from the drawer of the mirror at de Morville Castle. Wiping away the tears of Virginia, he supported her in his arms, while he read them with a faltering and hurried voice.

"Shall I confess to you, ever beloved Virginia, that the first idea which suggested itself to my wondering mind, on reading the letter of my father, was that of your being my sister? Determined to obey his wishes, this thought gave me no pain, until I became personally acquainted with you. It was then that I felt how inimical that belief was to my repose. Not to adore you was impossible, yet to adore my sister was criminal. Tortured by this terrible suspicion, I dared not hint to you my passion. I
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appealed to my mother, who had been the bosom friend of yours. I received her solemn assurance that I might rely on your being the daughter of lord de Morville."

Virginia sunk back into his arms. She covered her face with her handkerchief. Herbert's cheek touched hers; both were silent. At length he continued—"Sanctioned to adore you by the high authority of one whose veracity I knew to be sacred, I ventured to solicit your hand. You promised to be mine, and I deemed myself the most happy of men. Notwithstanding your unfortunate partiality for the imprudent countess, and the sad effects which already are beginning to occur from it, I fondly cherished the hope that I might be able to wean you from so disgraceful a connexion—a connexion which neither my family nor friends can sanction. Grieved to the soul by your unexpected appearance this night at the opera,

and

and still more so by the choice of your companions, I almost lost the power to defend a conduct which my sister considered as glaringly improper. Glad to quit the scene of my mortification, I hastened to call her servants. I saw you pass; you looked pale and dejected. I was on the point of springing towards you, when my passage was impeded by two gentlemen, who stopped before me; one of whom was attentively following you with his eyes. His person, his look, his voice, struck me as being not wholly unknown to me, and I recognized the stranger to be sir Charles Blandford, whom I had once seen at my father's, and whose presence evidently gave him the most serious uneasiness."

Virginia drew a deep and heavy sigh—it was the only sign she gave of animation.

"To account to you, my beloved, for my sudden journey, I must confess that it is occasioned by some words which
were

were spoken in confidence to the companion of sir Charles. Yet why should I add to your distress? A few hours will relieve my anxiety. Can you wait my return, dearest Virginia? will you give me this proof of heroic forbearance, of noble self-denial? since, after all, the words might not apply to yourself."

Virginia raised her languid head—she turned her heavy eyes on those of her agitated lover. "As yet," said she, in a faint voice, "you have only known me as a giddy wayward girl, the child of vanity and folly; you shall henceforward know me in a worthier light. I will, if you indeed request so hard a proof of my obedience, consent to remain in ignorance of that which I feel convinced will determine the colour of my future fate. But what does your dear mother say to a circumstance so unexpected?"

Herbert informed her that he had not yet seen his mother, but that he feared the
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the suddenness of his departure would increase her indisposition.

“ I will see her to-morrow,” said Virginia, “ and if possible pass the whole of it with her. I will also persuade my brother to excuse my attendance at the duchess’s rout ; the state of my feelings will render me wholly unfit for company.”

Herbert looked at his watch. It was past two. Again and again he embraced the disconsolate Virginia, and repeated his promise of returning as soon as the nature of his business would permit. “ Whatever,” said he, “ may be the result of my application, I will not conceal it from you. Beloved Virginia ! I must then claim another proof of your affection. For my sake you must name an earlier day for the completion of our happiness.”

He pressed his lips to her cheek, now tinged with the blush of modesty.

“ The Almighty,” he continued, “ is too just, too merciful towards his creatures.

tures, to visit the sins of the parents on the children. My heart assures me that my father in his last moments looked forward to the probability of our union. This thought re-animates my drooping spirits, and still holds out a prospect of attainable felicity."

Herbert was on the point of leaving the room, when lord de Morville, heated with wine, and mad from his repeated ill success at play, burst open the door. The first object which presented itself to his view was his sister leaning on the bosom of Herbert, who, with a countenance full of grief and tenderness, was wiping away her tears.

"Surely I dream," cried the young lord, angrily. "It cannot be Arthur Herbert, the sage Mentor of the day, the careful guardian of ladies' reputations, whom I now behold *tête-à-tête* with lady Virginia Sedley at two o'clock in the morning?"

"Your reproach, my lord, would be
just,"

just," replied Arthur, mildly, "had not my seeming violation of propriety been caused by necessity. Business of importance calls me to Bath. Mine was therefore not a visit of pleasure, but of pain. No personal gratification, my lord, could induce me to hazard the character of lady Virginia Sedley. Her peace of mind is dearer to me than my own. On my return I hope to be able to persuade her ladyship to bestow on me a right which will set all invidious remarks at defiance."

"I think it will be necessary," said his lordship, as he sullenly threw himself on a couch. Herbert, without seeming to have heard him, whispered a few words of affectionate consolation in the ear of Virginia, and then quitted her, not, however, without feeling a painful foreboding that their next meeting would not be as happy as they anticipated.

On his arrival at home, he let himself in by a private key, as he was accustomed

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ed to do when he staid late, that he might not disturb the slumbers of his beloved mother. Softly he ascended the staircase, lest a sound should alarm her fears. He paused at the door of her chamber to listen to her gentle breathings, but a movement within, and a long deep sigh, betrayed the restlessness of its lovely inmate.

A glow of pleasure suffused the countenance of Mrs. Herbert, on beholding her son-in-law. His presence seemed at that moment to be a most seasonable relief. “ You look surprised, my Arthur, to see me up at this late hour, but it has always been usual with me, for the last fourteen years of my life, to devote on the anniversary of this night some hours to meditation and prayer. Time, which has robbed me of youth, and of its tenderest protector, has not weakened the remembrance, nor effaced from my mind the horrors of this fatal night, when cold-blooded malice triumphed over
warm-

warm-hearted innocence, and placed me in a situation which, but for the noble generosity of your father, had left me the veriest wretch on earth. Another time, my dear son, you shall be made acquainted with the transaction to which I now allude. At present you want rest. Tell me, however, have you seen our beloved Virginia?"

Herbert stood in need of repose, yet it was necessary to inform his mother of his intended journey, which he did with all imaginable caution; notwithstanding which, Mrs. Herbert showed signs of manifest agitation and uneasiness. She forebore, however, to press for the reason of his journey; a secret fear restrained her curiosity, and she suffered him to leave her, without even venturing to make any observation upon the singularity of his conduct.

Alicia Glendore had, unfortunately for Virginia, no secret motive to silence her curiosity. She had artfully poured
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into the ear of Herbert her affected sympathy for the glaring imprudence of Virginia's visit to the opera. She had endeavoured to awaken his jealousy, by praising the dignified beauty of sir David Montgomery, and by noticing his particular attentions to Virginia. She had in part succeeded, and her heart beat violently with the increased hope of disuniting him from the friend of her childhood, when Arthur returned to announce the arrival of his sister's carriage. The deathlike paleness of his features, his evident absence of mind, and the wildness of his looks, alarmed his sister, and even made Alicia feel a something like self-reproach; but the intelligence of his quitting town early the next morning perfectly electrified them; while his declining to stay supper, and his hastening to the house of his betrothed bride, made them conclude that she was in some way connected with his mysterious journey.

Virginia

Virginia had not quitted her dressing-room, when Alicia, privileged by friendship, entered it. The countenance of Virginia betrayed her want of repose, while with a faint smile she returned the embrace of her treacherous friend.

“ I have passed, like yourself, a miserable night, my dear Virginia,” said the false Alicia. “ The fear of having offended you by the conduct I was obliged to observe last night at the opera, and the dread lest Herbert should be misled by the rumours of the day, as well as my surprise at his sudden journey, and strange concealment of its cause; prevented me from closing my eyes. God grant, my dear Virginia, that my fears prove groundless! but it is impossible to say what effect the displeasure of his family may eventually have on his mind; and Dorinda is obstinately resolved not to notice you, if you are in company with lady Deterville.”

“ Mrs. Glendore is certainly mistress
VOL. IV. C. of

of her own actions," replied Virginia, haughtily; "and though I may feel accountable for mine to her brother, I am not under the same necessity to his sister. Lady Deterville's beauty and unsuspecting confidence has gained her enemies among those who once were proud to be ranked among her friends. I should blush for myself, were I capable of being swayed by the caprice of little souls. It is merely a faction raised against her, which I hope the return of her husband will quickly put down. A generous mind, like yours, my dear Alicia, must be pained to conform to so cruel a restriction."

"Necessity has no law," said Miss Glendore. "While I am at Rome, I must do as Rome does. I have now no time to argue upon the injustice done to lady Deterville. In half-an-hour Dorinda will have risen, and she will expect me at the breakfast-table. Only tell

tell me, my love, is there any misunderstanding between you and Arthur? you did not part, I hope, in anger?"

The assurance of Virginia that nothing could be more tender, more satisfactory than the behaviour of Herbert on the preceding evening, struck a panic to the soul of Alicia—"I am happy to hear it," said she, in a tone which ill-accorded with her words; "I feared that it was otherwise; he was sadly incensed against you while we were at the opera. Both Reuben and myself have been miserable on your account." Then rising, she said, with a careless air—"Of course you know the place whither Herbert is gone, and the time of his return. Since you are on such good terms together, he would not refuse to make you his confidant."

"I am not at liberty to betray his secrets," replied Virginia, endeavouring to smile; "but you will know them most probably on his return."

Alicia checked her disappointed feelings, and with the semblance of affection, took a hasty leave of her friend, who, languid and feverish, remained in her chamber until the sound of carriage-wheels announced the arrival of lady Deterville.

CHAPTER II.



Mrs. Meredith and her niece had risen several hours before Virginia, but affection now led them to the breakfast-parlour, to inquire after her health. Lord de Morville had recovered from the effects of his ill-humour, and the fumes of the wine which he had drank the preceding evening, and was the most animated of the party. The servant brought letters for Mrs. Meredith—they came from

from the family of her brother, and their contents gave evident pleasure to the old lady.

“Good news! good news!” cried Mrs. Meredith, gaily. “Winny, what think you of the return of your old play-fellow, Joseph Warburton, with a fortune sufficient to make him independant for life? Your sister Anne has got a bouncing boy; Joseph is to be his godfather; and my brother writes me word that you must go down immediately, to stand godmother to the little heathen. Nay, no wry faces, Winny; a constant heart is better than a handsome set of features. Poor Warburton was always a good lad, and loved you from your cradle. It would be unkind of you not to be among the first to welcome his return. If Virginia can do without her old duenna, I should like to pass a week at my brother’s well enough.”

“The countess and I will take care of Virginia,” cried lord de Morville; “but

we shall, nevertheless, feel anxious for your return, and that of our amiable Miss Meredith."

Winifred felt embarrassed, yet a sentiment of grateful pleasure stole into her heart, at the idea of being still an object of affectionate remembrance to one whose image had been effaced by the superior attractions of the gay and handsome de Morville. She made an excuse to leave the room, lest she should betray the fluctuations of her mind; and in her absence Mrs. Meredith read over the letter of her brother, remarking that Joseph Warburton would be a most eligible match for her niece Winifred, who was one of the best girls in the world, and possessed of every requisite to make a man happy.

To this all present most readily assented, and none was more warm in the praise of the absent Winifred than lord de Morville. He knew the value of the heart he had neglected, and felt happy
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at an opportunity of expressing his sense of its worth; neither could he check a certain something, which reminded him how much more secure his own happiness would have been, had he but confided it to the care of the amiable and affectionate Winifred.

Mrs. Meredith, who proposed setting out that day for her brother's, with whom she meant to pass a week, in order, as she said, to sound the mind of Mr. Warburton with respect to her niece Winny, now left them, to give directions for her departure. Lord de Morville offered to escort the travellers a part of the way; and Virginia and the countess prepared to make their intended call on Mrs. Herbert.

As if the pleasure of the visit should not be without its alloy, the friends perceived that the carriage of Mrs. Reuben Glendore was in waiting at the door of her mother. The countess wished to drive past, in order to avoid so unplea-

sant a meeting; but Virginia, conscious of her own innocence, would not agree to give Dorinda the opportunity of a triumph. No sooner had the servant announced their names, than Mrs. Reuben Glendore rose and took leave. A formal inclination of the head was the only notice she condescended to take of her intended sister-in-law, or her lovely, embarrassed companion. But the tender welcome, the affectionate embrace, of Mrs. Herbert, made ample amends to Virginia for the coldness of Dorinda.

The changeful countenance of the countess betrayed the painful and mortified state of her feelings. She felt the insult more keenly, as being given before a person for whom she entertained the warmest esteem; and though conscious of having in some degree deserved it, she nevertheless experienced all the severity of wounded pride and degraded nobility.

Mrs. Herbert saw and pitied her distress.

tress. She took a hand of each of her young visitors, and leading them to a couch, placed herself between them. With extreme delicacy she touched upon the subject of Dorinda's altered manners, lamenting the natural haughtiness and obstinacy of disposition which never permitted her to investigate the nature of those actions which, at a first glance, seemed to her to be worthy of censure.

“My dear countess,” said she, affectionately pressing her hand, “if you and lady Virginia are disengaged this morning, I will relate to you my short but eventful history. It may serve, my sweet friends, as a salutary warning to you both; and may convince you that the most innocent actions are liable to be misconstrued, and that one little deviation from the strict rules of female reserve is sufficient to entail everlasting regrets and fruitless repentance.”

The countess, and particularly Virginia, expressed great solicitude to hear

the history of Mrs. Herbert, who, after pausing for a few minutes, as if to collect all her self-command, thus began:—

“ Like yourself, my dear lady Deterville, I was an only daughter, and, like you, I had early the misfortune to lose my best friend—a tender mother. To repair as much as possible this severe deprivation, my father, who was a man of family, but small fortune, obtained for me as governess a French lady of distinction, who, while she gradually unfolded to me the charms of literature, and the finer accomplishments, taught me also to value those which nature had, unfortunately for me, bestowed on my person. Under her tuition I became mistress of every fashionable requisite to fit me for the station for which my father and madame St. Omar had designed me. At the age of sixteen, on the day of my birth, I was informed that my destined husband was arrived to celebrate my natal day, and to claim
from

from my father my promised hand. You look amazed, my sweet friends; what then must have been my astonishment at learning that my destiny was already fixed!

‘ Ah, madame!’ I exclaimed, in a voice of terror and confusion; ‘ ah, madame! what is it you say? how can my father have promised my hand to one who has never even seen me?’

‘ You are mistaken, my love,’ replied madame; ‘ you may perhaps remember; that when you were only fourteen, your father made you sit for your miniature. You imagined that it was to be sent to your brother; instead of which, the copy was designed for Richard, the original for him at whose request it had been taken. Clear up your brow, my dear child,’ continued madame; ‘ the most brilliant destiny awaits you. This auspicious day, rendered sacred by your birth, you will be introduced to him who in future will regulate your actions,

and anticipate all your wishes, that he may receive the reward of your smiles and caresses. Already does his heart throb with every tender sentiment—already is he prepared to meet, in the pupil of madame St. Omar, a being worthy of his rank and of himself.’

“That nothing might be wanting to heighten the attractions of my person, madame dressed me herself with the most becoming elegance, yet she could not raise my timid spirits, though she was lavish of her encomiums on the exalted situation to which I was soon to be raised. Bred up in the retirement of a country village, and accustomed only to its circumscribed homage, my young heart felt a temporary elation, from the description of London and of its gay allurements. I remembered the delight I used to receive from visiting and relieving the humble tenants on my father’s estate, and I anticipated the increased pleasure of doing good to those who
might

might reside within the limits of my destined husband's domain. In imagination I founded a school for the infant poor, I attended to their instruction; I clothed the aged, and assisted the sick with all those little comforts which sooth the pillow of disease. I dwelt upon the good I should be able to dispense to those around me, out of the liberal settlement which was to be made me; and in the contemplation of others' happiness, forgot that my own might be the sacrifice.

“ With trembling limbs, palpitating heart, and cheeks suffused with blushes, I attended my father's summons to the dining-parlour. I heard myself introduced, and felt my hand pressed to the lips of a stranger, without venturing to raise my eyes from the ground. During dinner I gained sufficient courage to snatch a look on the future partner of my days—it was favourable to the interests of my noble lover. I had never
seen,

seen, within the limited space of our village, except my father, a form so dignified, or a countenance so expressively handsome. A glance from the brilliant dark eyes of the stranger made me hastily withdraw my own, nor did I dare to lift them from my plate for the remainder of the repast.

“ When I withdrew with madame St. Omar, she eagerly inquired my opinion of the stranger, and was in raptures at finding that I made no objection to his person or manners. We were soon joined by the gentlemen; and at the request of my father, I sat down to my harp. The praise bestowed on my performance by his guest gratified my self-love; and I then, for the first time, felt the desire of shewing off what talents I might possess. The stranger seated himself at the piano; he touched the keys with a masterly hand, and sung some beautiful lines, which he had composed in honour of my natal day. The style was animated

minated and tender; it breathed all the softness of the lover, with the richness of a poet's mind. It was the first tribute I had received in verse, and it was worthy the eloquent tenderness of my favourite Petrarch.

“In the evening we had a ball, which was attended by all the neighbouring families; but my hand was exclusively kept for my father's guest. Notwithstanding my inexperience, I could plainly perceive the great deference which the company paid to the rank and superior deportment of the stranger. It taught me a new and not unpleasant lesson, and I began to feel myself of more importance in society, since a man of the world, a man of letters; of rank and noble birth, had selected me to be his wife, in preference to the beauties of the court, at which he had chiefly resided.

“Next morning my father informed me of the proposals which he had received,

ceived, and which he had accepted. They were such as filled him with delight; and as I could have but one objection to the match, which was the extreme difference in our years, I felt unwilling to damp the joy of my parent by a seeming reluctance to obey his wishes. I however besought him to allow me time to study the temper of his guest; but to this my father objected—‘The sole duty of a wife,’ said he, ‘is obedience to the will of her husband. Remember this, and you cannot but be happy.’

“My father’s wishes were ever regarded by me as sacred; to them, and to the eloquent pleadings of my lover, I sacrificed my own inclinations. My heart had never experienced either the pains or the pleasures of that passion, which I knew only by name; and the dignified stranger had therefore a fair opportunity of making himself master of my affections.

“During

“ During the time which he passed at my father’s, I had more than once observed an occasional alteration in the voice and manners of my affianced husband, which alarmed my fears, lest the seducing softness of his deportment should only be assumed. I trembled at the possibility of his being otherwise than he appeared ; and felt that the peace and happiness of my life depended upon the endearing confidence and chaste affection of him to whom that peace and happiness was confided. My fears were overruled by madame, who was invited to accompany us to the stranger’s family seat.

“ In less than a month after the celebration of my birthday, my dear father saw the completion of his fondest wish. With all the proud exultation of a parent he gave my hand to his noble guest. Ah, little did he then imagine that he was consigning the child of his love to a fate more horrible than death !”

“ Dearest

“ Dearest madam !” exclaimed Virginia, in a tone of surprise, “ this is the first time I ever knew that you were twice married. Is it not strange that Arthur should not have told me of a circumstance of so much consequence to your repose ?”

“ No, my love,” replied Mrs. Herbert, as she kissed her blooming cheek ; “ Arthur knows not of it himself. My affection would not suffer me to wound his feelings by a narration of my private injuries—But to my story. The day after my nuptials I was conveyed by my husband to his estate, where I remained with himself and madame until he thought proper to remove me to town, that I might be presented on my marriage. The novelty of a new face, in which was depicted the unrestrained feelings of a young, lively, and affectionate heart, soon drew around me a crowd of noble but insignificant idlers, who first extolled the beauty of my person,

son,

son, then wondered that I could have suffered myself to be united to a man old enough to be my father. I smiled at their pity, laughed at their flattery, and was happy, though my husband was old enough to be my father."

Lady Deterville cast a timid glance towards Mrs. Herbert, who with angelic sweetness pressed the soft hand of the embarrassed countess.

"I was then little more than sixteen, and my husband nearly forty; my heart as devotedly his as if he had wooed and won me with all the romantic ardour of nineteen. Happy in my lot, I gave way to the natural liveliness of my disposition; I enjoyed the present, nor dreamed that the future teemed with innumerable ills.

"The first check to my gaiety of heart was the alteration in my husband's temper. The amusements which afforded me so much gratification seemed to call
forth

forth all the gloom, discontent, and suspicion of my husband. Frequently when I have been dressed, and on the point of stepping into my carriage, he has ordered me to remain at home, without assigning any other reason for his conduct than that it was his will."

"Cruel exertion of conjugal authority!" said Virginia. "How, my dear madam, did you act under such tyranny?"

"My affection for my husband," replied Mrs. Herbert, "made me at first yield quietly to his commands. While he only appeared capricious and ill-humoured, I thought it my duty to obey in silence all his wishes, however unreasonable they might be; but when I perceived that my submission only increased his petulance, and added to his discontent, I began to fear that I had mistaken the real character of my husband, and that his present conduct arose from
a natural

a natural love of tyranny and oppression, which every day became worse and worse.

“ Worn out by the continual recurrence of his sudden starts of passion, and unable to quell the violence of his temper by my willing obedience, I felt a temporary relief when we returned to the peaceful scenes of the country, and solaced myself by the vain hope that, as our happiness must then depend upon ourselves, my husband would be less inclined to quarrel with my endeavours to make him satisfied with himself. Vain were my hopes—vain my unceasing efforts to please! One moment he would caress me with seeming tenderness—the next reproach himself for having married a child, too young, as he said, to know her own mind, and who could not be expected to feel for a man of his age the proper tenderness of a wife. It was now that I discovered the ungenerous suspicions which had taken possession of him,

him, and redoubled my assiduities to convince him of his error. I became a mother; and my heart felt an additional claim to the affections of its father.

“About this time I lost my only surviving parent, and in less than three months my brother fell a victim to the climate of the West Indies, whither he had accompanied his regiment. The severity of this double loss took from me all power of exertion; and but for the smiles of my infant, I think I must have sunk under the heaviness of the blow. Time, however, and the duties of my situation, restored me by degrees to tranquillity. If I was not happy I was resigned, and felt grateful that my own economy enabled me to dispense blessings to those around me.

“My husband had resolved to reside wholly in the country, and to this I consented without a murmur. His cold repulsive manners soon disgusted the neighbouring families, who, one by one, excused

excused themselves from associating with a man no longer hospitable nor amusing. The solitude to which we were now consigned appeared to suit the gloomy humour of my husband, who was most social when alone; and I had once more begun to feed myself with hopes that time, and my steady tenderness, might amend his character, when a circumstance occurred which blasted for ever my new-born happiness.

“ A distant relation of my husband came to pass the summer at our house, and he brought with him his wife and infant family. The delicate health of the former made her immediately the object of my care, while her virtues and patient resignation under a lingering malady, rendered her dear to my heart. Disappointed in my own hopes of conjugal felicity, and deprived by death of the last remains of my family, my noble and affectionate brother. I eagerly clung, with newly-awakened tenderness, to the
gentle

gentle friend whom Heaven in its mercy gave for a short time to my prayers, and whose consoling sweetness beguiled my sorrows, and took from them a portion of their bitterness.

“ During their residence with us, I became more than ever the victim of my husband’s capricious tyranny. I will not pain you, my dear friends, by recounting the innumerable instances of his despotic authority. It is sufficient that his conduct, in spite of my endeavours to conceal it, became daily more visible to his guests, who in proportion as they pitied my sufferings, condemned and execrated their author.

“ When the winter arrived I lost the society of these amiable beings, whose tender and delicate sympathy made existence supportable. My affectionate counsellor was ordered to the Hotwells; and thus I was once more left to seek for consolation in the resources of my own mind, and the consciousness of de-
serving

serving a better fate. The waters of Bristol gave temporary relief to my suffering friend, and in the summer I again enjoyed the luxury of her society; but she was too far gone to admit a hope of her permanent recovery; and as the winter advanced, she was ordered to Clifton. Our parting was most painful to us both. I dreaded to be left alone to the unrestrained power of my husband, whose conduct, since the birth of my second child, had become still more insupportable; while my friend, who felt keenly the miseries of my situation, was tortured by the conviction of our separation being an eternal one.

“ With the most melancholy forebodings I saw her depart; yet how enviable was her lot compared to mine! she was accompanied by a husband, whose unremitting tenderness anticipated every wish — whose constant attention and gentle sweetness robbed even death of half its terrors; while I, the victim of

unfounded suspicion, bereft of all hope of conciliating the confidence of my husband, broken down by his repeated ill-humour, dispirited and exhausted both in body and mind, remained a prey to the anguish of a despair, which not even the consciousness of my own innocence could mitigate.

“ The habitual jealousy of my husband’s nature, which had been so long smothered, from a want of having some object on which to fix itself, now broke forth with terrible violence, on this second departure of his amiable relative. I listened without the power to reply. Indignation and horror kept me silent. At length I found courage to ask him if my patient forbearance, my steady tenderness, which had remained proof to a long series of unmerited oppression and unjustifiable tyranny, had deserved no better return than to give birth to his present cruel suspicion? Above all, I demanded what action of his guest had given birth

birth to his imaginary fears—‘Surely,’ said I, bursting into an agony of tears, ‘I should have thought that he was the last man to be suspected of so foul a crime. A man devoted to the happiness of his dying wife, and whose whole life has been regulated by every noble, every honourable sentiment—a man who seems incapable of injuring a human creature, is surely not likely to add to the sufferings of a woman whose existence has long been a burthen to herself, as well as to her husband. Such a man, I should have thought, might have been exempt from being made the convenient object of your unwarrantable accusations.’

“My husband appeared surprised at the unexpected display of my spirit, and for some time behaved to me with less harshness. Hope was no longer an inmate of my bosom, but I was resigned to what I now considered as my destiny. At the close of the winter my dear friend wrote to me her last adieus. She

was perfectly conscious of her approaching dissolution, and entreated that I would be a mother to her offspring after her decease. My heart had already adopted them as my own, but I was not at liberty to act according to its dictates.

“In less than a week after the receipt of this letter my friend breathed her last. The news of this melancholy event was soon followed by the arrival of the widowed husband, who vainly expected to find, within the retirement of our house, consolation and tender sympathy for his loss. My husband was from home, and I received him with that warmth of feeling which the nature of his distress called forth. We wept in silence over the untimely death of his amiable wife, and my tears redoubled as I expressed my fears that I should not be allowed to obey her last wishes.

“The cold and distant welcome given by my husband to his relation affected
me

me deeply. I knew that he was in expectation of being sent abroad, and would have given the world had I been suffered to receive his children under my protection. This was, however, strongly objected to by my husband, whose conduct at once betrayed to his astonished and indignant relative the base suspicions of his soul.

“ Unable to remain in our house after what had passed, yet unwilling to bid it a final adieu without conveying to me his sentiments, my poor friend watched for an opportunity to speak to me unobserved. His feelings could not be restrained. It was, perhaps, the last time of our meeting; and the fear lest his presence had unintentionally added to my misery, almost unmanned him. He fell on his knees before me, and invoked Heaven to pour down blessings on my head. In the fullness of his heart he execrated the cause of all my sufferings, and besought my pardon for having in-

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nocently

nocently occasioned me a moment's pain.

If,' said he, ' my death would restore you to tranquillity, how freely would I now this instant resign a life no longer valuable, since it cannot be serviceable to the beloved friend of my sainted wife! My God! that I should be suspected of harbouring a wish inimical to your repose! I, who have always regarded you as a being of a superior order, and who have worshipped you with a purity of affection which angels might sanction!'

" Blinded by my tears, which fell rapidly on his face, as it rested on my lap, I, in a tremulous voice, entreated him to rise, and to dismiss from his mind the idea that he was the cause of my husband's severity—' The only happiness,' said I, ' that I have enjoyed since my fatal marriage has been that which arose from my friendship with you and my lamented Dorinda; do not, therefore, regret our intimacy, since it has stolen a few months

months from years which would otherwise have been devoted to misery.'

"He rose, and with a look which even now is fresh in my memory, prepared to take a last farewell. His eyes wandered mournfully over the chamber—I thought that it brought more keenly to his recollection his deceased wife; I remembered her dying request—I wished to speak of his children, but the power of utterance was denied me. I envied her the silent rest of the tomb, and wished that I was peacefully laid by her side. The room seemed to move round with me, yet I saw the tender sympathy which beamed in every handsome feature of the agitated widower. I heard the melancholy word farewell—it appeared as if my last, my only friend, was lost to me for ever. I felt his arms encircle my sinking form—his face, wet with tears, pressed mine—the door of my chamber was burst suddenly open, and my husband and his chaplain entered—"

Mrs. Herbert paused ; her frame trembled, and she leaned for support against the throbbing bosom of Virginia ; while the lovely countess, in silent agitation, held her hand, which she repeatedly raised to her lips. Mrs. Herbert recovered, and embracing them alternately, then proceeded.

“ Vain were my protestations of innocence—vain the offered explanation of his relative, who generously repressed his own feelings, that he might soften those of my incensed husband. I was ordered to my room, but I had not power to move. I flung myself at the feet of my husband—I implored him only to listen to my vindication—I conjured him not to condemn me unheard. He was inmoveable. I was informed that two hours was granted me, to collect whatever I might choose to take with me ; after that I must leave for ever the home which my infidelity had dishonoured.

noured. I implored permission to see my children—it was denied me.

“Unable to bear up against a shock so severe as this last, I became insensible to his reproaches—insensible to every thing; and in this state I was conveyed by the author of all my woe to the cottage of madame St. Omar, who resided at a considerable distance from my own house. To her care I was consigned by my unrelenting husband, who forgot not to make known the story of my disgrace. From thence he hastened to town, where he immediately empowered his solicitor to commence the regular proceedings against him who in his blind fury he termed my seducer.”

“Merciful Providence!” exclaimed Virginia, shuddering with horror, “how little, dearest madam, did I suppose that you had gone through such a sea of trouble! how little did I think that you had experienced such severe, such unmerited distress!”

The lovely countess sighed, as she wiped from her beautiful eyes the tears of heaven-born sympathy.

“Alas, my sweet girl!” replied Mrs. Herbert, “Heaven, in pity to my afflictions, took from me the power of feeling them. For a considerable time my life was despaired of. Abandoned to my fate by him who ought to have watched over me with tenderness and pity, from a consciousness that had I indeed swerved from the path of duty, his own conduct had left open to me the general excuse of my sex, I yet found a friend, a nurse, a mother, in madame St. Omar. To her attentions I owe my life—to her mistaken zeal I owe my present comforts and my past miseries. But I have already, my dear friends, occupied a large portion of your time, and will conclude my story to-morrow. In truth, I am myself exhausted by the recollection of events which blighted the purity of my good name, and tore
me

mè from those beloved ties which alone had bound me to the world."

Both Virginia and lady Déterville forbore to press Mrs. Herbert to gratify their curiosity at the expence of her own feelings; yet they would gladly have relinquished attending the duchess's rout, to have heard the conclusion of a narrative which interested them so deeply. With regret they now took leave of their injured friend, promising to be with her the next morning to breakfast.

CHAPTER III.



VIRGINIA'S anxiety to learn the remainder of Mrs. Herbert's history made her rise earlier than usual. She had, to oblige her brother, accompanied him to the duchess of M——'s, where she had the vexation to perceive that Mrs. Reuben Glendore played as deeply and as unsuccessfully as usual, to the great mortification of her amiable husband. She had so complete an aversion for cards herself, that she would not allow that any merit was due to her for preferring any other amusement to them; yet Reuben thought that so young a woman as Virginia deserved praise for not suffering herself to be teased into the foolish custom of doing as other's do.

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To the satisfaction of Virginia, sir Charles Blandford was absent. He only looked in for a few minutes, and then retired; but she caught his eye, and her face immediately crimsoned with blushes. She heard him say to the duchess, as he regarded her attentively—"It is a pity that she did not make choice of sir David Montgomery—a great pity indeed!" and Virginia wondered what reason sir Charles could possibly have to disapprove of her union with Arthur Herbert. Lady Deterville, as well as herself, was out of spirits; and as they wished to be with Mrs. Herbert by her breakfast-hour, they retired early on that account. -

As soon as the countess's carriage arrived in St. James's Place, Virginia hastened to the chamber of her brother, but he was not there. The young lord was too well acquainted with the movements of the countess not to be ready to pay to her the first salutation of the morning—"Cruel creatures," said he, "thus
to

to leave me to make a solitary meal. Out of pure necessity I believe I must turn Benedict, for I hate mortally to sit down to table alone."

"But, my dear brother, were you married, you might not always be able to command the society of your wife. If she was a fashionable one, it is most likely that she would prefer any other person's to that of her husband."

"I do not suspect that such will be my case," replied lord de Morville, gaily. "What think you, my lovely friend?" turning to the countess.

"I think," said she, with an embarrassed look, "that you had better go and breakfast with David; he is in the same situation as yourself, and will be grateful for your company. Remember, my lord, that you and your sister are engaged to dine with me to-day."

"Is it possible that you should suppose such a remembrance necessary?" whispered the young lord, in a voice of reproachful

reproachful tenderness, at the same time raising her hand to his lips. Virginia's sigh, which came most truly from her heart, recalled her brother to his recollection. A smile of ineffable sweetness irradiated his fine features.

"I will take your advice," said he, gaily, "and breakfast with sir David. Remember me, with every sentiment of esteem and affection, to Mrs. Herbert." So saying he handed lady Deterville and his sister to the carriage, and then hastened to take his morning's repast with sir David.

Mrs. Herbert was waiting for her young friends. She received them with an affectionate embrace, while the quickness of Virginia immediately discovered that she had suffered from her willingness to oblige. It appeared extremely strange to our heroine, that she had never mentioned the name of her absent son, nor the mystery which had caused his sudden and unexpected journey. Yet
Virginia

Virginia believed that this silence must be intentional, and perhaps proceeded from a disinclination to touch upon a subject which must be painful to them both.

After the servant had withdrawn the necessary appendages to the breakfast-table, Mrs. Herbert prepared to begin the remainder of her history ; not, however, without evincing a considerable degree of disquietude, shame, and agitation.

“ Abandoned to my fate by my cruel husband, robbed of my good name, and exiled from the sight of my adored children, my mind wanted strength to preserve its reason under so severe a blow. For a considerable time I continued insensible to the maternal kindness of madame St. Omar, as well as to the distraction of him who was the innocent cause of my banishment. By degrees I recovered to a sense of my degraded state, and to a consciousness of undeserved suffering.

suffering. I ventured, after the expiration of six weeks, to inquire after the proceedings of my husband. Madame St. Omar pressed me to her bosom—her tears bedewed my burning face—I *felt* that the measure of my woes was not yet full.

‘My child,’ said the worthy preceptress of my youth, ‘you are not yet strong enough to listen to a recital of what has passed during your illness. Unable to act for yourself, I have, to the best of my poor abilities, studied how to snatch you from the malice of your tyrant, and preserve to you the only consolation and comfort now left you to enjoy.’

“I besought her to satisfy my painful curiosity, and promised to bear with resignation whatever she might have to recount.

‘I take you at your word,’ said madame St. Omar. ‘If I perceive that you manifest any feelings but those of a
just

just indignation against the base and cowardly traducer of your innocence—if I see that you yield to any other sentiment than that of resentment, I am silent as death.’

“ Again I promised, and entreated her to be explicit.

‘ When you were conveyed to me, my dear child, under the imputation of conjugal infidelity, I received you with open arms. I disbelieved the positive and repeated assertion of your guilt—I listened with incredulity to the proofs of your crime—and I shuddered at the cold and resolute determination of your accuser. The curse which passed over your head, my child, will fall upon his own. To my prayers he was inexorable—not even the sight of your loved form, which lay on the couch, cold and insensible to his rage, called forth one tender movement in his flinty bosom—“ She never loved me,” said he, stamping violently on the floor; “ I never had her heart.

heart. The difference of our years forbade the return of my love—she deceived herself and me. Tortured by this conviction, I have been the veriest wretch on earth since our ill-judged union; but the chain is broken which linked us together—I caught her weeping in the arms of another! My heart is closed for ever to any further attempts to beguile me. Henceforward she is an alien to my bosom, and an exile from the home of her children. Never, never again shall she contaminate their innocent lips by the touch of hers. Should her seducer abandon her to the solitude she deserves, I will, in that case, allow her just enough to live on, but not one farthing more. From this hour she is dead to myself and her children—a short time, and she will not even have a right to the name which she has dishonoured.”

‘ Merciful Heaven!’ I exclaimed, clasping my hands together in an agony of grief, ‘ how have I deserved this dreadful

dreadful calumny! what action of my life has merited so foul a suspicion? Ah, madame! you know not the extent of my sufferings. God is my judge, that I devoted myself willingly to the happiness of my husband—that I felt for him the purest affection—and that neither my heart nor my thoughts ever wandered from him to another. But surely the world will not condemn me unheard. I can prove my innocence, and assert my claim to the guardianship of my infants.’

“Madame shook her head expressively—‘Alas, my child! how weak and feeble is the voice of innocence, when opposed to that of powerful guilt! Appearances are against you—nay, start not, my beloved pupil—where will you find a man who will not take part with your husband—who will not say that the delicate situation in which you were found at least authorized him to accuse you of impropriety? I believe you innocent,

nocent,

nocent, but the world will think otherwise.'

"Judge of my feelings, my dear friends, upon my hearing this speech of my worthy governess. My despair was frightful—it alarmed madame, who saw that it was necessary, at all hazards, to rouse me from my complete despondency—'During your illness, my child,' said she, 'your husband instituted his suit against your imagined seducer. The idea of your sufferings—the dread of what might be the consequence of them—the horror of being also the innocent cause of them, operated so forcibly on the mind of this ill-treated man, that he besought an interview. I could not refuse it. He came—he disclosed to me the unjust suspicions of his relation, and the uniform oppression of his conduct—he represented you as an angel, mild and forbearing; patient under the caprice of a cold-blooded tyrant, whose perversity and gloomy temper not only rendered himself

himself wretched, but every human being around him—he implored my advice. I gave it, from the conviction that, under the circumstances in which the baseness of your husband had placed you, one only line of conduct was left you to pursue. I may have been wrong; but I at least have secured to you a home—a friend whose heart bleeds for your distress, and who will think himself the most favoured of mortals, if he is but allowed to sooth and mitigate your sorrows.’

“ I started, as if from the prospect of a boundless gulph; my brain seemed on fire, yet my perception was sufficiently clear to comprehend the meaning of madame. I flung myself at her feet—I besought her not to add to my load of misery—I conjured her to let me die innocent, since I could not live with honour.—‘ Die!’ exclaimed madame, her eyes sparkling with rage, and every feature evincing her resentment; ‘ die! my dear
.. child,

child, and for whom? for a wretch incapable of enjoying the happiness within his reach—a wretch who, blind to the tenderness of a heart like thine, poisoned every moment of your existence by his unworthy fears—a wretch who has moved heaven and earth to prove your infidelity, and who has cast on your name a stain which time even can never obliterate.’

“ I see, my lovely Virginia, my dear countess, how truly you sympathize in my unhappy history. Even at this period of time I shudder when I look back on the past, when I reflect that I was condemned — nay, actually divorced, without having for a moment swerved from my duty to my husband.”

“ Oh, madam !” exclaimed the countess, “ I do indeed pity you. How cruel must have been that heart which could intentionally wound yours ! But how was it possible for your husband to procure a divorce ?”

“ I will

“ I will tell you,” replied Mrs. Herbert, blushing deeply from the remembrance. “ By the advice of madame, whose soul burned with resentment against the author of my miseries, my supposed seducer, by his silence, allowed himself to be considered as guilty. Immense damages were laid for his having seduced the wife of his friend and relation—they were paid into court—and thus was the accusation of my husband stamped with the seal of justice. The public papers were full of remarks upon the injury done to my husband, and the perfidy of my seducer; they pitied me, because even in the blind fury of my accuser’s rage, he did not attribute to me any levity of conduct. How was I to act? for a time I resisted the wishes of madame—I refused to see my companion in distress—I prayed only for death—I thought only of my children, and of the probability of yet seeing them. At length I yielded to the tears of madame.

dame. A letter which she had received determined my fate. With a delicacy of mind which few men possess, the favourite of madame had never intruded on the privacy of my retirement. He was now appointed to a situation abroad of high importance, and he implored her to obtain for him a farewell interview. Never will the remembrance of that meeting be effaced from my mind. At the sound of his foot all my boasted firmness forsook me, and I sunk insensible on the bosom of madame. His voice restored me to my senses; the most respectful delicacy regulated his conduct; he spoke of himself, of his future establishment in life, of the probability of his remaining abroad, and of his children; he inquired with a hesitating air if he might be allowed to bring them to take leave of me? I remembered my own beloved infants, and tears deprived me of utterance.

“He came next day, and I gained

courage to revert to the dreadful past. Madame could not be silent; her heart was devoted to his cause. He ventured to second her wishes; he conjured me on his knees to give him a legal right to protect me. In India we might be happy, for in India we should be far removed from our enemies. The eloquence of pure affection can never be listened to without exciting, more or less, a degree of interest in the bosom of the hearer. I felt all the shame, all the disgrace of my situation. I knew that I had the power of bestowing happiness on another—of becoming a mother to his children. I felt also the impossibility of embracing my own; I wanted courage, degraded as I was, even to attempt it.

“The tenderness of friendship, the soothing of an affection which bordered almost upon idolatry, at length determined my actions. Every thing was ready for his departure; he lingered only

only in the hope of being able to take with him the poor abandoned victim of a husband's jealous cruelty. With a palpitating heart I consented to unite my fate with his. Had I been mistress of the world I could not have bestowed my hand on one more qualified to render a woman happy, more calculated to make the dreary desert become a blooming paradise, than the ever-to-be-lamented father of Arthur Herbert."

Virginia raised her eyes to the countenance of the amiable sufferer, who pressed her affectionately to her bosom. "Sweet girl," she continued, "how enviable is thy lot! Pure and innocent even from the shadow of reproach is thy blameless life. As the wife of my darling Arthur, I know you must be happy, must be good. Ah! could I have drank of the famed waters of Lethe, when I bade adieu to the white cliffs of my dear native isle, could I have forgotten the adored pledges which I left behind,

hind, could I have torn from my memory the recollection of what *I had once been*, and of my severe and unmerited injuries, my happiness was more secure than generally falls to the lot of mortals; but even at that distance from the scene of my disgrace, I trembled lest the news of it should reach the spot on which I resided in all the pomp of eastern splendour. Not all the tenderness of a heart devoted to my comfort; not all the magnificence by which I was surrounded; not all the respect and reverence with which I was treated, could hush to rest my constant fear. I never entered a brilliant assembly but my eye rapidly ran over its gay visitors, lest some English friend or acquaintance should be there, who might remember me as the deserter of my infant family."

"Such, my dear friends, is the outline of my painful story; it is not more singular than true. Oh God! should these lovely beings now before me ever be
placed

placed in a similar situation to mine, may they remember the severity of my sufferings! may it teach them to start even from the semblance of guilt! may they remember those beautiful lines of Rowe!

“ If poor weak woman swerve from virtue’s rule,
 Ruin ensues, reproach and endless shame,
 And *one* false step entirely blasts her fame.
 In vain with tears her loss she may deplore,
 In vain look back to what she was before,
 She sets, like stars that fall to rise no more ”

Mrs. Herbert repeated these lines in a manner so exquisitely pathetic, that they called the tears into the eyes of the already moistened eyes of Virginia, while lady Deterville sobbed aloud. Mrs. Herbert embraced them alternately. “ My dear countess, this proof of genuine feeling renders you more interesting than the most brilliant display of your talents. I feel for you, my sweet friend, in a particular degree. Like me, a parent’s wishes led you to the altar ;

like me, your husband's age doubled your own. But oh ! how unlike the jealous arbiter of my fate is the good, the kind, the unsuspecting lord Deterville ! In the privacy of your chamber, my dear countess, remember my sad history, and should a wandering idea suggest itself that you might have been happier with some one else, banish it from your mind, as dangerous to your honour, and fatal to your repose. To you, my Virginia, this caution is unnecessary. Hymen for you has weaved his softest fetters, while love will strew with thornless roses the uneven path of life. In the arms of my beloved Arthur you will forget that the unnatural prejudices of your father ever caused you a sigh ; and I shall have the delight of seeing you possessed of a nobler fortune than even his kindness could have left you."

" Ah, madam !" replied Virginia, mournfully, " I fear that I am not constituted to be happy. A restless curiosity

sity embitters my existence, and turns my pleasures into pains. I long to know more of my family than I do; I pine to be acquainted with all that concerns my mother, for my heart tells me there is a mystery attached to that beloved parent which it is my duty to be acquainted with, and which is connected with my own repose. But say, dearest madam, what became of your poor children? Did you ever hear of their welfare? Are they still in being? Oh, how keenly can I enter into the deprivation they endured when bereft of your protecting love!"

"Your question, my sweet girl," said Mrs. Herbert, much agitated, "shall be the subject of another morning's conversation. You have my permission to confide to your *brother* that of to-day. He is young, and just entering the world; my misfortunes may not fail to make on him the impression I desire. To-morrow my Arthur has promised to return

to us. To-morrow, dearest Virginia, I shall therefore hope to see you."

Lady Deterville and Virginia now took leave of Mrs. Herbert, and returned to St. James's Place. Lord de Morville was waiting for them. He had promised to attend the countess to her friend lady Elizabeth, but she was not then in a *proper* frame of mind to listen to the conversation of her lively and dissipated ladyship. She remained until late with Virginia, who repeated to her brother the singular and affecting narrative of Mrs. Herbert. Again did the tears of the countess stream at the recital of injured innocence; again did her heart speak in the most impressive language, and remind her that Mrs. Herbert, though blameless even in thought, and faithful to the last to her cruel tormentor, yet suffered the punishment of the guilty. Alas! where was the guardian angel of the lovely countess at this moment, when her mind fluctuating between

tween good and ill, half resolved to abandon the acquaintance of her immoral adviser, and fly for protection against the suggestions of her own heart to the bosom of her lawful protector.

Silent, sad, and irresolute, lady Deterville reclined on a distant couch, while lord de Morville listened in mute attention to his sister; yet his dark eyes, softened by affectionate sympathy, turned every now and then towards the object of his soul's dearest emotions. He saw the changeful expression of her beautiful features, and judged what was passing within her mind. Virginia, at the close of her narrative, left the room for a few minutes, to give orders to her maid. The young lord hastily rose, and flung himself by the side of the countess.

"My Isabella! my beloved, my angelic Isabella!" said he, in a tone of trembling tenderness, "why have you declined calling on our mutual friend? Will she not think it strange that you

should not keep your appointment with *her* ?”

The countess raised her jet black eyes from the ground, and fixed them mournfully on her lover. “ Our *friend*, de Morville ! ah ! rather call her our bitterest enemy. Had she been indeed my friend, would she not rather have counselled me against the criminal wanderings of my heart ? would she not have reminded me of the inevitable ruin which must involve both you and myself, if I gave way to a passion which must sink me in the estimation of all who are good and amiable ? I will not see lady Elizabeth after this day. I will leave town instantly.”

“ How !” cried lord de Morville, in a faltering voice ; “ and can you so coolly resolve upon breaking my heart ? Will you deprive me of every ray of happiness, by tearing yourself from my sight ? Ah ! inhuman Isabella ! thus to devote to eternal misery a man who loves you
with

with such fervency as I do, and who would willingly sacrifice the world, were he but master of it, to possess thy affection."

He hid his face in the folds of her dress; she felt his form tremble against hers, and her soul, in which virtue had taken up a transient abode, now melted at the view of his distress.

"De Morville," said the weeping countess, bending her graceful body over his, "do not add to my affliction by your reproaches. You know too well the state of my feelings, you know your power over my heart; respect its struggles, beloved de Morville, respect its lingering goodness, which still shudders at the approach of vice, and which would fain be virtuous, though the sacrifice can only be the resignation of all I value, all that binds me to existence."

The young lord raised his head; he flung his arms round the slender waist of the countess; he pressed her to his

bosom. “ Ah, Isabella! you would be more than mortal, but the tenderness of your nature makes you a woman still. I hear my sister coming; promise me, sweetest Isabella, that you will accompany us to Mrs. Trelawny’s masked ball—promise me, I conjure you.”

The countess gave a reluctant consent to his wishes. Lord de Morville once more became animated with hope. He rose exultingly; his heart told him that he had gained a victory over the expiring virtue of the countess, but that it must be followed by prompt and vigorous measures. She must not be allowed time for reflection. His friend, lady Elizabeth, must be informed of the new-born repentance of her pupil; her advice should determine his conduct. He looked at his watch, and resolved to call on lady Elizabeth, who was engaged to dine with lady Deterville.

Lord de Morville was not long in dressing.

dressings. His manly and handsome figure, his animated and expressive features, required no assistance from art. In a few minutes he was in the drawing-room of lady Elizabeth Lester, who smiled graciously on her favourite as she gave him her hand to kiss.

“ You see that I am incapable of resentment,” said she, gaily, “ and that I forgive you for preventing the countess from keeping her appointment. In *your* society she may be excused for having a short memory.”

His lordship would have been gay also, but his feelings were hostile to mirth. He was ready to sacrifice everything to the passion which engrossed his soul, yet he had heard the history of Mrs. Herbert, and it had given birth to a painful monitor. It reminded him that, though he was but just entering into life, he was on the point of tarnishing it for ever. A few weeks, and he would be of age, yet what would be his
first

first exploit? what noble deed should he perform on becoming master of the estate of his ancestors? He sighed bitterly as he repeated to lady Elizabeth what had fallen from the lips of the countess in the morning.

“Why surely you are not weak enough to be low-spirited, de Morville!” said lady Elizabeth. “A few qualms of conscience, indeed, are no more than I expect; but it would be a crying sin to allow the old dotard to continue in possession of one of the finest women in England. What but the vain pride of calling so lovely a creature his wife could have induced lord Deterville, at his age, to marry a girl of sixteen? The world must agree with me that he deserves to be punished for his folly. You must decide quickly, my lord, or Isabella may turn heroine, and sacrifice you to the peace of her old drone of a husband. She will then be very good, but very miserable; and you——”

“Oh,

“ Oh, I know,” replied his lordship, colouring deeply ; “ I should be a great fool, and the laughing-stock of my dear lady Elizabeth, who has so generously espoused my cause.”

“ I will do more, de Morville ; I will engage to put you in speedy possession of Isabella, if you will get every thing ready for your departure. How I shall enjoy the confusion of the old earl, and the rage of sir David, while you are secure from the reach of their vengeance ! You have only to go abroad for a year or two, live upon love, and then return, and become the sage benedict, the pattern of all modern husbands.”

His lordship promised eternal gratitude to his fair instructress. Pleasure sparkled in his eyes, and added to the bright carmine of his cheeks. To be sole master of the fate of Isabella, to be her sole companion, to be the object of her tenderest thoughts, her softest caresses—oh ! it was worth the loss
of

of fortune, of fame, and, if necessary, of life ! Such were the false reasonings of the youthful earl of de Morville, as he led lady Elizabeth to her carriage, which quickly conveyed them to the house of the man against whose honour and peace they were secretly plotting.

CHAPTER IV.

.....

THE unexpected appearance of Herbert at Mr. Glendore's greatly alarmed the whole family, and it was some time before he could make them believe that his journey was solely on his own business, which was of a private nature with Mr. Glendore. Juliana inquired if he was not the bearer of letters from Virginia and Alicia, but he assured her that they were only apprized of his intention

tion when it was too late to put their wishes in execution.

Mrs. Glendore had a variety of other questions to ask, at the same moment that she was dying with curiosity to learn what could have brought young Herbert expressly from town to speak to her husband. Why would not a letter have done as well? But Mr. Glendore, who read in the flushed countenance of Arthur his anxiety to be alone, and who had already divined the cause of his visit, conducted the traveller into his study, as soon as he had taken some necessary refreshment.

The general character of Mr. Glendore for friendliness and goodnature, encouraged Herbert to enter immediately upon the subject which occupied his mind. With all the delicacy of nice feelings, he depicted his own unwillingness to search into the mystery of his father's last bequest; although it would have saved himself from many a bitter pang.

pang, which the uncertainty of his thoughts had at times occasioned him. He spoke of Virginia with all the eloquent tenderness of exalted passion; yet he confessed that her being the daughter of his early friend, the countess de Morville, was one of the strongest claims to his affection.

“ I had brought myself to believe so implicitly that she was the offspring of lord de Morville,” said Herbert, colouring as he spoke, “ that I had given up all idea of seeking an explanation of the mysterious words contained in the letter of my father. A circumstance which took place last night at the opera once more awakened my suspicions. The peace of Virginia, as well as my own, seemed to hang on the breath of a stranger, and I resolved at last to apply to you, my dear sir, to solve the enigma of this letter.”

Mr. Glendore received from the hand of Arthur the last epistle of the governor.

nor. He read it over attentively, while the eyes of Herbert watched with anxiety its effect. At length he returned it, saying—"I cannot sufficiently praise, my dear young friend, that filial reverence which has so long restrained your very natural curiosity; yet I lament that you have not applied to me before. Delicacy withheld myself from betraying the secret of the friend I loved and valued most on earth, but I wished that you had been less scrupulous. Tell me, however, to what stranger you allude as being the cause of your present inquiry?"

"Last night," replied Herbert, "I accompanied my sister and Alicia to the opera. Lady Virginia and the countess of Deterville, with sir David Montgomery, were also there; but as I was not apprized of their coming, I felt some degree of vexation, especially as Dorinda has thought proper to drop the acquaintance of lady Deterville. My mind was not in the most enviable state when I
left

left the box to seek after my sister's servants. My steps were stayed by the mention of Virginia's name, in a sort of half whisper. I turned hastily round, and saw sir Charles Blandford and another gentleman. It was the latter who had been praising the person of my beloved. 'Yes,' said sir Charles, 'she is a very sweet girl, graceful and unaffected; but had you seen her mother you would have scarce bestowed a thought on her daughter. I knew her when she was younger than lady Virginia; she was one of the loveliest women I ever beheld. I saw her afterwards as lady de Morville, a star of the first magnitude, brilliant and dazzling; but too soon did its lustre vanish, and its brilliancy was lost for ever. I was from England when I heard of the fatal intelligence which transformed the angel of my fancy into a mere woman. I pitied lord de Morville, but I had no pity to bestow on an unfaithful and inconstant wife.' Such
were

were the words of sir Charles. He passed on, but I remained fixed to the spot; my head became dizzy, I felt the faint and dreadful sickness of the heart, and it was with extreme difficulty that I concealed from my sister what had so deeply affected myself. I could not exist any longer in suspense, and I resolved to apply to you, as the friendly confidant of my father, before I sought an explanation from sir Charles. Tell me, therefore, my dear sir, I conjure you, what are the claims which my Virginia has upon my affection? In what manner can my father have deeply injured her whom he never saw, except when a mere child? But above all, I entreat you to tell me if my fears are unfounded? Was the angelic being, whose image from my boyhood has never been effaced from my remembrance, was she unfaithful to her marriage vow, or did she die, as I have been taught to believe, when I was in my eighth year?"

"Lady

“Lady de Morville did not die, as you were led to imagine,” replied Mr. Glendore; “she yet lives to thank you for the constancy of your youthful tenderness.”

“Ah, Heaven!” exclaimed Arthur, in a voice of extreme agitation; “wherefore does she live? Dear to my soul as is the recollection of my early friend, yet I would sooner have heard the confirmation of her death, than that she had lived to sully the purity of her fair name—lived to bring a blush upon the cheek of her innocent daughter.”

“Judge not too hastily, my dear young friend, nor expect more of human nature than it is able to perform. You cannot suppose that I, who am a family man, mean to become the advocate of conjugal infidelity; yet there may exist circumstances by which the enormity of that crime may be lessened.”

Herbert shook his head.

“You will perhaps disbelieve me,
when

when I assure you that I have known appearances so strongly against a woman, that she has even been divorced from her husband, though in fact she was actually innocent of her alleged crime. To convince you of this, listen, my dear boy, to the history of one who ought to be far more dear to you than the countess de Morville, and who has strictly and sacredly fulfilled to you and to your sister the duty of a mother."

Mr. Glendore now repeated to the astonished and agitated young man the chief part of that narrative which Mrs. Herbert had disclosed to Virginia and lady Deterville. During this recital the face of Arthur underwent a variety of changes. His breath seemed to shorten as the story drew near its conclusion, and he passed his hand over his eyes, to conceal what he feared might be deemed a weakness.

Mr. Glendore pressed the other affectionately in his—"My dear Herbert,"
said

said he, soothingly, " I can easily conceive the nature of your present feelings; yet rejoice with me that your noble father conducted himself with so much honour towards the persecuted victim of unfounded jealousy. Surely the heart of his son will not be less compassionate. The sorrows of your inestimable mother-in-law must render her more dear to you."

" My love for her will not admit of any increase," replied Herbert, mournfully; " but I cannot immediately still the agitation of my feelings. Ah! my dear sir, how severely must my father have felt on being the cause, though the innocent one, of her sufferings! Could he do less than devote his life and fortune to her whom he had so deeply injured?"

" Surely not," said Mr. Glendore; " but as you see that it is possible for a woman to be condemned as guilty, though perfectly innocent, do not pre-
judice

judice yourself against lady de Morville, lest her case be similar to that I have just mentioned."

"When my father first presented me to Mrs. Herbert," replied Arthur, "I was then prepossessed with the idea that it was my early friend—my gentle favourite, and addressed her as lady de Morville. It was the first time that I had ever experienced the anger of my father. He chid me severely for my folly, and ordered me to my room, at the same time telling me that he desired that name might never again be mentioned by me. His commands were always sacred to me, and by degrees I began to believe that the pale and melancholy M^{rs}. Herbert could never have been the blooming and lively countess de Morville. Still there was a fleeting something, a resemblance which at times deceived my fancy, and seemed to bind me more closely to the object of my father's idolatry. But say, my dear

sir, in what light am I to take the words of sir Charles Blandford? Surely, had no degree of criminality attached to lady de Morville, she would not have abandoned her children, and suffered them to remain in ignorance even of her existence?"

"All that I can say is," replied Mr. Glendore, "that appearances are against her, but that she may be found to be more worthy of the tender compassion of her children than of their reproaches. Mrs. Herbert was the bosom friend of the countess; she knew her from her childhood, and was acquainted with every action of her life. From her lips, not from mine, you must learn the fate of the countess; from her also you must hear explained the meaning of your father's dying bequest, of which however she is yet ignorant. Suffer me to enclose his letter in one from myself, which I will trouble you to deliver to her. It will pave the way for the disclosure of
your

your wishes, and save yourself likewise from the painful repetition of what has passed between us."

"But, my dear sir, is Mrs. Herbert acquainted with the residence of lady de Morville? and is it really your opinion that she can explain to me, better than yourself, the mystery couched within the words of my father? It was to you that he bade me apply."

"True; but as things now stand, I conceive that your mother is far more able to do justice to both your father and lady de Morville, than I am. I would return with you to town, but that the health of my dear Marian has become considerably worse within this week, and I dare not leave the house, lest she should breathe her last sigh in my absence."

Herbert was much shocked at this intelligence. He loved the amiable Marian, for who that ever knew that sweet

etherial form, that gentle yet brilliant mind, who was there that did not admire and love her? Though indisposed, as well from fatigue of mind as body, he would have left Bath that night but for the persuasions of Mr. Glendore, who, after a little friendly conversation, re-conducted him to the drawing-room, where he received every kind attention both from Mrs. Glendore and Juliana.

The next morning, when Mr. Glendore retired to write to Mrs. Herbert, her son was led by Juliana to the chamber of Marian. The spectre-like appearance of that young and lovely creature made Herbert give a start of sudden horror. Notwithstanding the alarm expressed by her father, he had hoped to find her better; he was unprepared to find her dying. She saw him, and smiling with angelic sweetness, beckoned him to advance. He bent over her as she reposed on a couch; he feared to
lose

lose a word of her once silvery-toned voice, which now in low and broken sounds passed across his ear.

Her first inquiry was for Virginia, and upon being informed that her friend had not had time to write a letter, but could only send a verbal message—"No matter," said she, "for my eyes are now become too weak to read it. This is indeed a pleasure! I did not expect to behold once more the beloved, the affianced husband of my Virginia. Tell her, for I know how dearly she loves me, that my case is now hopeless. I have suffered much since I quitted town, and look forward with joy to my release. My parents wish to send for my brother and Alicia; but why should I render them uselessly miserable? They can only add to my grief by my seeing theirs. Tell my angel friend that she is ever present to my mind, and that my last prayer will be breathed to Heaven for her happiness. Dear Her-

bert, in your hands I feel that it is secure."

The entrance of Mrs. Glendore put an end to the conversation, and Arthur quitted the interesting sufferer, with a sad foreboding that never again, in this world, would his eyes be gladdened with the sight of her. Contrary to his own inclinations, Herbert felt himself compelled to stay until after dinner, that he might be the bearer of letters which Mrs. Glendore and Juliana requested him to deliver to his sister and Alicia. Politeness obliged him to accede to their wishes, and it was therefore late before he set off on his return to London.

Mrs. Herbert was just sitting down to her solitary meal on the evening of the third day, when the travelling chariot of her son-in-law drove up to the door. In a few minutes she strained him to her bosom, but it was not until after the cloth was removed that he ventured to deliver to her the letter of Mr. Glendore.

Glendore. Then stepping into a hackney-coach which he had ordered to be procured for himself, he hastened to the house of lord de Morville, his own mingled feelings of hope and fear preventing him from noticing hers.

Virginia was anxiously awaiting his arrival. She had declined accompanying her brother to dine with lady Elizabeth Lester, that she might be ready to receive her lover. At the sound of his well-known foot she flew to bid him welcome. She felt the pressure of his lips to hers, and her heart seemed to revive, and her frame to receive new vigour from his presence.

“Are you well, my dear Arthur, quite well? And how did you leave my poor Marian?”

Herbert assured her of his own health, but wanted courage to inform her of the real state of Marian's. He thought it best to prepare her by degrees for the loss which it was now certain she must

sustain. He delivered to her the message of Marian, but softened as much as possible its melancholy import.

Virginia sighed deeply. She wiped away the tears which had started as the fear of losing so dear a friend as Marian Glendore crossed her mind, and trying to smile, said—"Are you the messenger of good news, my Arthur?"

"I hope that you will consider them as such, my love," he replied; "yet as far as regards the explanation of my father's letter, I might have spared myself the fatigue of the journey. Mr. Glendore has referred me to my mother, who he says is much better calculated to satisfy my curiosity than himself. I have delivered to her a letter from him, enclosing that of my father, which has given me so much uneasiness; but my anxiety to see you did not permit me to remain and await its effects. I have however drawn from Mr. Glendore a secret which well rewards me for my journey,

journey, since I hope that it will at once silence all my dear Virginia's solicitude on the subject which has so long engrossed her attention."

"Ah!" cried Virginia, hastily, "that secret can only belong to my mother." She paused; the quick beating of her heart stayed her tongue, yet her eloquent looks besought him to proceed.

"You judge rightly, my Virginia," said he, throwing his arm round her slender waist to support her trembling form; "the secret does indeed belong to your mother. Take courage, my beloved; compose yourself; an unexpected happiness awaits you."

Virginia looked her surprise. The blood once more tinged her cheeks. "You are too good," said she, faintly, "to trifle with my feelings, and know full well how sacredly dear I hold every thing connected with the memory of my mother. Tell me speedily, therefore,

I beseech you, what you have to communicate."

"Suppose then, my dearest Virginia, that I should tell you that the countess is still living!"

"Living! my mother still living!" exclaimed Virginia, wildly; then bursting into tears she sunk on the bosom of her lover, and hiding her face—"Oh, no! my mother cannot be living, or I should have heard from her—I should have seen her before now."

"My own beloved Virginia," replied Arthur, pressing her still closer to his heart, "my dear, my affianced wife, I had flattered myself that the possibility of lady de Morville being still in existence would have caused you to feel no other sensation than that of pleasure."

"Ah!" said Virginia, sighing, "you cannot tell, my Arthur, what are the feelings of a neglected, deserted, unowned child. You cannot imagine the state
of

of my heart at this moment. A crowd of distracting ideas press upon my brain. My father's prejudice, my mother's silence! oh, what dreadful cause——!"

Herbert felt alarmed by the deathlike paleness of her looks. He kissed her cold lips, he called her his own adored Virginia, and besought her to compose herself for his sake. She smiled on him affectionately.

"Be tranquil, my sweetest love," he cried; "hope for the best. When you are less agitated, we will go to my mother; she will satisfy your doubts, and from her you will learn the past fate, as well as the residence of the countess."

"Let us go then immediately, my dear Arthur; let me not lose a minute. I shall not sleep until this load is removed from my mind. Yet stay, let me write a line to my brother. Oh, my mother!" said she, raising her hands and eyes to heaven, "why have you estrang-

ed yourself from the arms of your children ?”

Herbert gave her the inkstand. With an unsteady hand she scrawled the following lines:—“Our mother still lives. Follow me, my dear brother, to Mrs. Herbert, who will explain every thing.” Then giving the note to a servant to take to his master, she, with trembling limbs, suffered herself to be supported by Arthur to the coach, which still remained at the door to await his orders.

Mrs. Herbert was pacing the drawing-room in extreme agitation, when she saw her son and lady Virginia alight. She paused to collect herself; she knew the delicacy of the task she had to perform, and trusted to Heaven for succour and support.

Virginia entered. She threw herself into the extended arms of Mrs. Herbert, and wept for a few minutes in silence on her bosom. At length she said—“Ah, madam !

madam! forgive me, but my mother! my dear mother! say, does she still live? Will she for ever deny me the felicity of embracing her?"

"Compose yourself, my sweet girl," replied Mrs. Herbert, much affected; "your unfortunate mother still lives. She has suffered greatly; but her chief misery arose from her being separated from you and your brother."

"Dearest madam!" cried Virginia, hastily, "what for so many years could have prevented a mother from seeking consolation in the filial tenderness and filial duty of her children?"

"Necessity, my love, dire necessity alone compelled your mother to appear neglectful of your welfare."

"I will believe you, madam, yet my heart can but ill define what that necessity could be which is strong enough to stifle the voice of maternal love. Cruel indeed must that necessity be which could permit my mother to remain as
dead

dead to me, which could force her to deny herself the sight of her children ! Oh, surely when my father abandoned me, my claim to my mother's love was stronger than that of any other."

"Dearest Virginia, your mother was ignorant of your father's unnatural and unjust conduct towards you. Had she believed it possible that he could have extended his hatred to you, that he could have slighted the double claim your innocence had on his paternal care, could she have supposed that he would even bereave you of the privileges of your birth, and basely affix to your name a stain which he knew to be false, no circumstances would have withheld your mother from making her existence known to you ; and if, dearest Virginia, she has for so many years patiently submitted to her fate, if she has yielded to necessity, during her exile from England, it was from tenderness to your feelings,

feelings, not from want of affection. To see you was impossible, to write to you she deemed equally so, and when circumstances restored her once again to her country, the dread of meeting with the reproaches of her children checked the long-wished-for discovery."

"In England! my mother in England!" cried Virginia, eagerly; "oh, let me hasten to throw myself at her feet—let me fly to receive her blessing, to assure her of my fondest, warmest affection, to convince her of my willing obedience, and to devote my life to her future comfort."

"Amiable and beloved girl!" replied the agitated Mrs. Herbert, as she leaned for support on her equally-agitated son. "Dearest, sweetest Virginia! and can you so generously excuse the seeming neglect of your mother? can you so readily bestow on her the proofs of a tenderness which absence and her supposed death

death might have naturally extinguished?"

"You would not ask that question, my dear madam, were you acquainted with the love I have always cherished for the memory of my mother. You know not how dearly I have treasured the least trifle that once belonged to her, how anxiously I have sought for the developement of that mystery which I felt was attached to her, and how my heart beats to be folded in her maternal embrace!"

"And will you forgive her being the innocent cause of your father's barbarity towards you?" enquired Mrs. Herbert, in a voice scarcely audible. "Will you not rather regret the existence of a parent whom circumstances may make you ashamed to own?"

The sudden start of Virginia electrified Mrs. Herbert; it was more emphatic than a volume of words; while
the

the deep blush which tinged her face and neck betrayed her fears. Mrs. Herbert scarcely seemed to breathe. Her head sunk on the shoulder of Arthur, who trembly supported her in his arms, surprised and wondering at what he heard. At length Virginia ventured to raise her eyes towards her future husband; she felt that his heart was irrevocably her own; she breathed more freely, and throwing herself at the feet of Mrs. Herbert, who appeared almost lifeless, she said—"Ah, madam! you feel for me—you feel for my mother—you doubt my affection; put it to the test—reveal to me the residence of my mother—restore me to her, and let my conduct prove the strength of my filial tenderness. No circumstances can alter the heart of her child. My mother must always be dearer to me than life."

Virginia still knelt before Mrs. Herbert, who, bursting into tears, flung her arms

arms round the lovely girl, and pressed her passionately to her bosom. "My wish is gratified, my prayer is heard," murmured Mrs. Herbert; "I am permitted to acknowledge my beloved daughter, and I die contented."

"My mother! my beloved, my adored mother!" exclaimed Virginia, wildly, "oh, speak to me, bless your child—your own long-estranged Virginia. Fly, Arthur, for some water. Oh, Heaven, preserve to me my mother!"

The agonies of Virginia, the more collected tenderness of Arthur, soon recalled Mrs. Herbert to a sense of their distress. She clasped them alternately to her bosom, while Virginia clung round her, as if she feared to be again separated from her newly-recovered parent.

At this moment of surprise and rapture lord de Morville arrived. The interesting group before him, the looks of Virginia, and the tears of Mrs. Herbert, who

who was supported by his sister and Arthur, joined to the quick beatings of his heart, revealed to him who was his long-lost parent. He sprang forward, he clasped her to his breast. "My mother! my tenderly-beloved mother!" said he, falling on one knee before her, "bless your unworthy son. Oh, amidst the levity and folly of my nature, you know not how dearly I have cherished the remembrance of your maternal love; you know not how sincerely I have mourned your loss, and with what sacred affection I have worshipped you as the mother of my friend."

Mrs. Herbert wept, but her tears were tears of joy. She embraced and blessed her children; she tried to command her voice, that she might assure them of the sentiments to which they had given birth. "My children," at length she said, while her fine blue eyes beamed with affection on the three lovely beings before her, "my children, you

you have heard my short but eventful history. In the presence of my Creator I affirm my innocence. Never, even in thought, did I swerve from my duty to lord de Morville; yet as the world believes me guilty, I have chosen to seclude myself from its intercourse, lest I should meet with reproach and insult. Oh, my beloved son! my dear Virginia! you cannot imagine what have been my sufferings; separated as I have been from your presence. Could I have forgotten you, the undeviating tenderness of Mr. Herbert, and the filial affection of his son, would have made me the happiest of women. It is now, my dear Arthur, that you can comprehend the meaning of your father's last request. He knew from Mr. Glendore the unnatural conduct of lord de Morville towards his unoffending child; he wished that the love of his son might solace her for the loss of her father's; he trusted that in the original of the miniature, his Arthur might

might discover a being capable of exciting the same steady and undeviating attachment as that which he felt himself towards her mother."

"My father did justice to the heart of his son," exclaimed Arthur, warmly. "Every creature related to the object of *this* veneration, and of my boyish fondness, must be dear to me. Oh, how often has my heart told me that you were my long-idolized countess—how often have I gazed upon your countenance, and traced in your well-known features those of my lovely adopted mother—how often have I longed to breathe to you her name! but the recollection of my father's prohibition checked my youthful wishes."

"And yet, my Arthur, I might have said with Shakespeare—

"Oh, grief has chang'd me since you saw me last,
And careful hours and time's deforming hand,
Have written strange defeatures in my face,"

for the severe illness, with which I was afflicted after being so rudely torn from my home, and from my children, made me but the shadow of what I once was. I was indeed changed, but not so materially as to have deceived any but a child. To the kindness of Mr. Glendore I am much indebted. He, with the greatest caution and delicacy, made known to me the situation of Virginia, and introduced me to my children, in a manner that could not awaken their suspicion. Ah, my son! how little did you imagine the cause of my emotions, on revisiting once more the castle of de Morville! Neither did you, my Virginia, suspect that the reason why I requested you to exchange the brooch found in the drawer of the mirror, was because it contained the hair of my own children. In that drawer I had thrown a note which I had received from Mr. Herbert, on the evening of our fatal interview. To recover it, I

stole

stole to the chambers once occupied by myself. It was gone, and in retreating through the private pannel, I fear I occasioned you some alarm."

Virginia remembered the night, and the terror she had felt from the disappearance of the female figure. Herbert coloured as he confessed that it was he who had removed the note. "Yet," said he, "my motive must excuse the theft. I knew by the hand-writing that it came from my father, and I feared lest its contents should awaken, without satisfying, the curiosity of my Virginia."

Virginia's eyes revealed her thanks, while the varying expression of her brother's features betrayed a consciousness of error. "I have acted rashly," said he, extending his hand towards Arthur, "and deserve to be called ungrateful, but you must forgive me, Herbert."

"My dear lord," replied Arthur, embracing him, "think of it no more. I had already forgotten the circumstance.

From

From your hands I hope to receive the best gift of Heaven. My dear father consigned to my care the miniature of my destined bride, but it is my friend who will bestow on me the beloved original. Say, dearest Virginia, in this hour of happiness, may I not implore you to hasten the consummation of mine? may I not press you to name an earlier day than that already fixed upon for the celebration of our nuptials?"

Virginia still leaned on the bosom of her mother, who fondly kissed her crimson cheek, while her lover pressed within his own her soft white hand, in trembling expectation of her reply.

"What says my child?" inquired Mrs. Herbert, tenderly; "shall our Arthur sue in vain, or will my Virginia consent to become his before the settled time?"

"I would not appear ungrateful," replied Virginia, "or indifferent to the wishes of him whom I value above all the world; but I have fixed my heart
upon

upon becoming his on the birthday of my dear brother. It will then be a day of double felicity, and you, my dear mother, will be present to share our bliss. In three weeks we shall return to de Morville Castle—we shall revisit it with new feelings; every thing around us will contribute towards the commemoration of the joyful nativity of my brother. On his natal day the hearts of all his tenants will be open to pleasurable feelings. They will include my name in their prayers for his prosperity, and the same voices that are raised for him will not fail to call down blessings on my head, and that of my beloved Arthur. I shall feel that my happiness is more complete, if I date it from the birthday of my generous brother.”

“ I plead for my friend,” cried the young lord, evidently under some secret agitation. “ Life, my Virginia, is uncertain; delay not to enjoy the happiness which is within your reach. I vote for

the amendment of your motion—for this day three weeks say this day se'nnight."

"And I must vote for the resolution standing as it is," said Mrs. Herbert, smiling on her son with all the fond pride of a mother. "Our Virginia's wishes will, I know, be a law to my Arthur. In three weeks my son will be of áge, and my sweet girl will then gladden the soul of her mother, by becoming the wife of one of the best of men. Never, my Arthur, can I do justice to thy worth. Be but like thy lamented father, and my child must be the happiest of her sex."

Herbert felt himself obliged to yield, but he felt also that indefinable something within his own mind, which told him that in this instance he was wrong. In vain, during the evening, did he try to shake off that uncomfortable sort of lowness, which seemed to reproach him for his want of firmness. He saw the smiling happy face of Virginia, which
appeared

appeared to gain new beauty from her filial tenderness; he saw also the altered looks of Mrs. Herbert, whose beautiful features beamed with all the affection of an adoring mother—he heard her sweet voice breathe forth her happiness on being thus fondly acknowledged by her children, and he wondered that *his heart* should feel sad when theirs appeared so joyful.

But it was not *his heart* alone that was heavy; that of lord de Morville, though transported by the recovery of a parent, whom he had supposed to have been so long dead, was nevertheless oppressed by its secret upbraidings. From the hour in which he had beheld Mrs. Herbert, he felt for her that kind of affection which sanctifies its object. Though gentle and tender in her manners, yet he feared her displeasure, and dreaded to incur her censure. His necessities alone had made him apply a second time for pecuniary assistance to Arthur. The

mild remonstrance of Herbert upon his pointed attentions to lady Deterville, and his own feelings, irritated by the conviction of his fault, and the consequent justness of his friend's reproof, had made him act towards Arthur with seeming ingratitude; while, in fact, he esteemed him above all other men: and now that he discovered in Mrs. Herbert the mother whose memory, even in his wildest moments, had power to damp his exuberant spirits—now that he knew her to be still living—that he was restored to her caresses, and to those sunny smiles of maternal tenderness which had made on his infant mind a deep and lasting impression—his heart still felt a sickening sadness as its tumultuous throbings reminded him, that he was no longer deserving of her praise or of her love.

Lord de Morville had dined with lady Elizabeth Lester, in company with lady Deterville. Before the arrival of Virginia's

ginia's note, he had planned every thing according to the wishes of lady Elizabeth, who saw in the young lord an easy tool, on whom she could work at will, to execute her plan of revenge on lord Deterville.

To explain the motive of this revenge, it is only requisite to say, that before his marriage with Miss Montgomery, lady Elizabeth had cast a longing eye on the noble fortune of the earl; and though she discovered that he was by far too old for the beautiful Isabella, she would willingly have excused his age herself, to have become mistress of his wealth. All her allurements proved useless—the earl married Miss Montgomery, and lady Elizabeth never forgave the insult thus offered to her person by the preference of the earl. Lord de Morville's unfortunate attachment to the young countess opened to lady Elizabeth a fair field for her vengeance. She loved lady Deterville, though she despised, or ra-

ther hated, her husband, and considered that she could not prove it better than by snatching her from the arms of a *doting old fool*, and placing her in those of the young and handsome de Morville. To effect this had been her study; and the plans, if not the prayers of the wicked, at last succeeded.

It was the certainty of having decided upon his future destiny, and of having also joined with his that of the lovely and imprudent Isabella, that saddened the heart of lord de Morville, and damped what would otherwise have been some of the happiest moments of his life. He shuddered at the idea of giving pain to that tender mother, whose unmerited sufferings demanded from her children at least every attention to her future repose. His heart sickened as the possibility occurred to him, that a short time hence, and the face of that adored mother would be drenched in tears—tears which his own dishonour would call forth.

forth. Unable to rouse his spirits, or force his features to assume a smile of tranquil happiness, he heard with delight the proposal of Herbert to call on Dorinda, and if she was disengaged, to bring her to share in the joyful discovery. When alone with Arthur, he easily excused himself from returning, by pleading a prior engagement. This excuse was accepted, and he hastened to impart to lady Deterville the unexpected event which had taken place.

CHAPTER V.

HERBERT, to his infinite satisfaction, found Mrs. Reuben Glendore at home. A severe cold had obliged her to nurse herself for one evening, and Alicia, out of compassion, lest she should die of *ennui*, remained as her companion and comforter. The intelligence which they derived from his visit, if it did not amuse, at least surprised them greatly. Dorinda feared to stir out, lest she should increase her indisposition; but she promised to breakfast with her mother next morning, and to call on Virginia, to assure her of her affection before she went to Mrs. Herbert.

As it was deemed prudent that Mrs. Reuben Glendore should not expose herself

self to the night air, Arthur kindly proposed to bear her company, and to relate to her the painful history of their affectionate parent. Notwithstanding the odd qualities which composed the character of Dorinda, she could not refrain from weeping over the sufferings of one, who to her had ever been the best and tenderest of friends. She read with deep attention the letter of her father—gazed with new-kindled affection on the miniature worn by her brother—and expressed herself in the handsomest terms, as willing to consider the original as her sister.

Alicia listened with mute attention to the narration of Arthur. She felt no disposition to check the generous warmth of Dorinda's feelings, or to interrupt the eloquence of her brother. The unexpected discovery that Virginia's mother still existed, and that Mrs. Herbert was once the much-admired but *divorced* countess de Morville, gave to her fertile

mind the fairest pretext for disuniting Virginia from her affianced husband. She knew the romantic nature of her lovely friend, and the power which she still had over her. She felt assured that, upon her suggesting one circumstance to Virginia, she would herself acknowledge the impropriety of her union with Arthur. It was this which gave fresh hopes to the selfish soul of Alicia, as holding out to her a certain prospect of success. It was of little consequence to her the misery which she should draw on the unsuspecting companion of her youth, so that she separated her for ever from *her own* model of all human perfection. Divided from Virginia, there was still a chance left for herself. Who could so well fill up the void in his heart, as the *affectionate* and *sympathizing friend* of his Virginia? Who could so feelingly enter into his sorrows, console him under his afflictions, sooth him in his despondency, and soften the acute-

ness

ness of his sufferings, as the confidant and companion of Virginia?

Never had Alicia felt the tardiness of time more irksome than she did this evening. Not even the presence of the man she idolized could allay her impatience to breathe the poison of pretended friendship into the ear of Virginia. So fully was her mind bent on the plan she had to execute, that she scarcely closed her eyes the whole of the night; and when she arose the next morning, her looks betrayed, not indeed the malignant workings of her heart, but her want of usual repose.

Reuben had gathered from his wife the heads of the narrative related to her by Herbert. He instantly foresaw that the discovery would be attended with the most painful consequences, and his heart felt for Virginia the liveliest interest, as well as the softest pity. Hastily putting on his clothes, he went to the chamber of his sister. The paleness of

her looks he attributed to her solicitude for her fair friend, and immediately began the subject of the preceding evening's disclosure.

“ Our poor friend Virginia,” said he, in a tone of heartfelt commiseration, “ what an awkward situation is she now placed in ! she will never be able to bear the sneers and ill-natured remarks of her acquaintance, which must inevitably be the case if she marries the son of him whom the world considers as the seducer of her mother. Poor girl ! how sincerely I pity her ! If I were Herbert, I would change my name, and return to India ; that is the only thing now left him to do.”

“ I doubt whether that will satisfy the nice feelings of Arthur, or the delicacy of Virginia,” replied Alicia, sighing with affected sorrow. “ It is indeed a most unfortunate circumstance. I think my father was to blame in keeping the secret from Herbert. Had he known the
bar

bar which existed to his union with Virginia, he would, most probably, have placed his affections on a far different object, and ere this might have become the husband of one whose mind would have been better adapted to his own, and with whom he might have been permanently happy."

"You seem always to have believed, Alicia, that it is no difficult task to transfer one's affections from one object to another; but experience has not made you wise; and yet why should you suppose that you alone are capable of being constant in love?"

"What do you mean, my dear brother?" inquired Alicia, blushing from the consciousness of his meaning.

"My meaning is simple and easy to be understood," replied Reuben, smiling good-naturedly on his sister; "but since you are rather dull of comprehension this morning, my dear girl, I will assist you a little, and translate into plain English
your

your own words—Had my father acted with prudent foresight, he would have confided to Herbert the real cause of lord de Morville's brutal neglect of his daughter, and the delicate situation in which he stood towards her. Herbert would then have done his best to forget the beauty of Virginia—he would have been grateful to Alicia Glendore for her tender attentions, &c. and in a little time have made her an offer of his hand and fortune, which she, after some hesitation and many blushes, would have joyfully accepted. This is *your* meaning, is it not, Alicia?"

"How can you trifle, Reuben, when the happiness of Virginia is at stake? I expected to have seen you more serious."

"My levity belies my heart," replied Reuben, gravely. "No one can feel more deeply for lady Virginia Sedley than I do. If I could but assume your form for half-an-hour, I would prove to
her

her how faithfully she might rely on my friendship."

At the sound of his wife's voice he hurried to meet her, leaving Alicia rather mortified at the quicksightedness of her brother, and more than half-inclined to believe that he still retained a lingering affection for his first love.

Dorinda had risen earlier than usual, that she might pass a few minutes with Virginia, while her carriage was getting ready. She was still indisposed, but nothing would have prevented her from seeing her mother, except the positive inability to rise from her bed. The unexpected visitant found lord de Morville and his sister in the breakfast-parlour; the latter was most agreeably surprised by the affectionate manner of Dorinda, who embraced her with every appearance of real kindness, and congratulated her upon the recovery of a beloved parent.

The generous heart of Virginia instantly

stantly warmed towards the adopted daughter of her mother, and she returned, with redoubled interest, the pleasure which she had received.

The congratulations of Reuben were less animated than those of Dorinda. He pressed the hand of Virginia in his own, a melancholy tenderness dimmed his eyes, and Virginia thought that she felt him tremble, as he, for the first time since the discovery of her rank, called her by the familiar epithet of "dear Virginia." He was himself a model of filial tenderness—what then could occasion in *his* breast any thing like a symptom of regret that a long-estranged child was at last restored to a mother whom she had considered as dead? Alicia too—what could render her so unusually thoughtful?"

Virginia did not long remain in ignorance of the cause of Alicia's gravity. As she did not accompany her brother and Dorinda to Mrs. Herbert, Virginia
invited

invited her to remain, and partake of the breakfast which was now brought in. As soon as it was over, lord de Morville retired, and Alicia was left to pursue her projected plan of being the first to undermine the peace of her young friend.

After listening with great attention to the overflowings of Virginia's affection for her mother, Alicia said, gazing at the same time with melancholy tenderness on the lovely enthusiast—"Dearest Virginia! why am I compelled by the warm solicitude of real friendship to damp the brilliant prospect your imagination has portrayed in all the vivid colours of youthful imagination! why must I remind you of the uncertainty of all human affairs, and prepare your mind to bear with firmness the reverse of your own glowing picture! Alas, my beloved Virginia! the idea of your misfortunes, which you seem not to foresee, has robbed me of my rest. I could not sleep, for my mind was full of the most
painful

painful images, and I hastened this morning to perform one of the most melancholy of all duties, that of awakening you from the dangerous dream of felicity, which has so long occupied your thoughts."

"You alarm me," cried the terrified girl. "What misfortune, my dear Alicia, is hovering over me, of which it is necessary that I should be warned? If I am predestined to be unhappy, which I am unwilling to believe, I shall at least have the consolation of knowing that the heart of my mother will sympathize in my affliction, and that her soothing voice will soften down the asperity of my griefs."

"Alas, my sweet friend! I wished to have congratulated you upon the restoration to life, I may say, of your amiable mother; but I foresaw that with the disclosure of her injuries, your happiness was most intimately connected. All good and innocent as she is, yet,
pardon

pardon me, my love, if I speak a painful truth, the world still believes her guilty of infidelity. What then will the world say to the delicacy of the daughter's mind, if she bestows her hand on the son of the reputed seducer of her mother?"

Alicia paused to see if the stroke had taken effect. It pierced the heart of Virginia; she felt a sudden chill come over her, her respiration ceased, her cheeks, her lips became colourless, and she fell into the arms of the exulting destroyer of her peace.

The soul of Alicia rejoiced as she beheld the beautiful but lifeless form of her unsuspecting friend, beautiful even under the semblance of death; but her hatred was not of that nature to wish her dead—she wished her to live, to suffer gradually the punishment due to her vanity and to her presumption, which had taught her to aspire so high as to become mistress of the heart of Herbert—

Herbert—"I will restore her to a sense of her misery," said Alicia. "She has already stolen from oblivion some moments of temporary ease."

Virginia re-opened her languid eyes, and fixing them on the deceitful countenance of her pretended friend, burst into an agony of tears. Alicia pressed her to her bosom. She wept also; but hers were not the tears of godlike friendship, or of soft-hearted pity; yet they fell on the face of Virginia like balm upon a wound—they seemed to assure her that she should not be destitute of the consolations of sympathy.

"Dearest Alicia!" faintly murmured Virginia, "you have indeed performed the duty of a true friend. You have awakened me to a sense of my real condition, and taught me to view in a new light my attachment to Herbert. Oh, mother beloved! it is now that the cruelty of your fate pursues your unhappy child. It is now that a double punishment
awaits

awaits you, in the ruin of your daughter's happiness! yet never, oh never from me shall you learn the fatal cause which separates me from him I adore. My Arthur, my beloved Arthur! what will be thy sufferings! who shall venture to disclose to you that our parents' misfortunes, which united them so strongly together, forbids our union!"

Overcome by the excess of her feelings, she leaned on the bosom of Alicia, who, now that the blow was struck which had vitally wounded her friend, thought proper to offer her the common-placed sentiments of common-place comfort.

"In India," said she, half-fearfully, "if you would consent to become an exile to India, you might yet become the wife of Herbert."

"No," replied Virginia, firmly, "my own newly-awakened feelings would be as keenly alive to the impropriety of the connection in India as in England. No, Alicia, my heart may break, but it will
remain

remain true to its present sentiments. From my cradle I have been the sport of fortune; my father banished me from his presence, when my tongue had just learned to lisp his name—his hatred remained to his death. In his dying moments he left to posterity a sad memento of unnatural prejudice. The dishonour he brought on my innocent mother he entailed also on her offspring, and I am the second victim of his cruelty. But who will break gently to my beloved Arthur the delicate reason which compels us to separate?”

“There is no task too painful for true friendship to perform,” said Alicia. “I will be the unwilling messenger of evil, and disclose to my poor friend what delicacy forbids you to converse on. I will represent to him also the necessity of preserving from the knowledge of your mother the change which necessity demands in your conduct to each other. It will be difficult to convince a lover that

that he must voluntarily give up the idol of his soul; but all that mortal persuasion can effect, you may rely that it shall be my study to accomplish."

"I know that I may trust you," replied Virginia, mournfully; "your eloquence is powerful; when warmed by the cause of friendship, it will not be exerted in vain. Arthur must feel and own the propriety of my resolution to sacrifice my happiness to the opinions of the world. To-day you will see him—he will be here by twelve. Stay, dear Alicia, and receive him. I will endeavour to recover myself from the shock I have sustained, and will go to lady Deterville, that I may avoid a meeting until my spirits are able to encounter the sight of his distress."

To this Alicia readily assented, and Virginia a short time afterwards, though more dead than alive, prepared to pay her visit to the countess.

The

The wildness of her looks, and the flushed appearance of her cheeks, alarmed lady Deterville, who, with *unassumed* tenderness of voice and manner, inquired the reason of her agitation?

Virginia, with streaming eyes and trembling limbs, which refused to support her enfeebled body, recounted to her *real* friend all that had passed between her and her *pretended* one. Though occasionally interrupted by broken sobs, yet she soon made the countess acquainted with her wretchedness, and received from her all the consolation that the softest pity and tenderest sympathy could bestow.

“If, indeed,” said the lovely countess, “you deem it necessary to sacrifice so much to the opinions of the world, why not fly from that quarter of it which is acquainted with your rank and story? Why not accompany Mr. Herbert to India? There you at least would be
unknown,

unknown, and the love of such a being as Arthur Herbert might well repay you for your banishment from England."

Virginia shook her head—"No personal consideration would induce me to leave my mother, and the climate of the east has already proved highly injurious to her. No, my dear Isabella, I must submit to what Heaven has decreed for me. Dearly as I love Arthur, I should not be happy, if I thought that by marrying him, I had drawn on myself the censure of that part of the world whose good opinion is worth preserving. My own private feelings also would reproach me. I should fear the future upbraidings of my children—nay, even of their father, for having yielded too easily to the pleadings of my own tenderness."

"Oh, talk not of love!" exclaimed the beautiful countess, while her jet black eyes betrayed that she was one of its victims; "talk not of love, Virginia, if
VOL. IV. u you

you would not sacrifice every thing at its shrine. How! can you wish me to think that you are seriously attached to Herbert, and in the next breath resolve to abandon him! So cold a passion, so languid a flame, is scarcely worthy of the name of love.

‘The jealous god, when we profane his fires,
 Those restless passions in revenge inspires,
 And bids them make mistaken mortals groan,
 Who seek in love for aught but love alone.”

While the countess was ably advocating the cause of Herbert, he was listening in mute horror to Alicia Glendore, who, with all the art of which she was mistress, so contrived what she had to disclose to him, that it should seem as if Virginia had been the first to propose their separation. She even took occasion to throw in some well-timed remarks on the fickleness of human nature, and once ventured to touch upon the natural levity of Virginia’s disposition

tion. But Herbert was alive only to the justice of Virginia's feelings; and though he loved her dearer than life, and though to resign her was more than he was able to perform, yet the delicacy of his mind assented to the seeming impropriety of her marrying the son of him who, it was generally believed, had seduced lady de Morville from her fidelity to her husband.

Alicia appeared to feel for his distress, and Herbert, of course, was grateful for her kindness; but his sorrow was not of a nature to receive consolation, and he took, therefore, a hasty leave, determined to hear, at all events, from Virginia herself what was to be his fate. He was well aware of the necessity of keeping from the knowledge of his mother-in-law the delicate state of her daughter's feelings towards himself, and in case that she persisted in her intention of resigning him, resolved that, through him at
H 2 least,

least, the innocent cause of their misery should never be informed of what occasioned it.

In a state of mind hopeless and despairing, Herbert continued to wander from place to place, until the hour when he supposed Virginia would return. He conjectured that she would pass the day with lady Deterville, and that she would probably be the confidant of her thoughts. Pale and dejected, his dress disordered, and his hair uncurled, Herbert, in the dark of the evening, once more called to inquire for lady Virginia. She was not yet returned, and he was on the point of leaving the hall, when Amy, who was passing, and who was alarmed by the whole of his appearance, entreated him to wait the arrival of her lady.

The kind-hearted girl soon followed him into the drawing-room. She besought him to take some mulled wine and toast, which she had prepared for him,

him,

him, as the night was extremely cold, and he was not even shielded from its keen air by the comfort of a great-coat. Herbert thanked her in his usual sweetness of voice, and partook of the wine. He found it revive his spirits and warm his torpid limbs; but he looked so sad, so completely wretched, that Amy would have given the whole of her little wardrobe to have found some excuse to remain with him. She however drew towards the fire a couch, on which she begged him to repose himself; and then, lingering for a few minutes to see if he took her advice, reluctantly quitted the room.

Worn out by the violence of his feelings, and the fatigues of his body, for he had not till now tasted of any thing since his breakfast, Arthur flung himself on the couch, and insensibly dropped asleep. Amy softly entered the apartment, and covering his face with one of her mistress's handkerchiefs, as

softly retreated, wondering what could have befallen one so handsome, so rich, and so sweet-tempered as Mr. Herbert. What could possibly make a man like him as miserable as a common person?

Amy watched with impatience for the return of her beloved lady. She heard the sound of carriage-wheels, and hurried down to the hall, first taking a hasty peep into the drawing-room, where Arthur still slumbered. The countenance of Virginia was not calculated to revive the hopes of Amy, who, however, followed the footsteps of her mistress up the great staircase, and informed her of the state of Mr. Herbert, and of his being still in the drawing-room.

“I cannot see him, Amy, to-night. Say I am unwell—say any thing to excuse my seeing him.”

“Not see Mr. Herbert when he is ill and unhappy!” said Amy, almost crying. “Oh! do go to him, for pity’s sake! dear lady Virginia. He looks so miserable,

miserable, that my heart bled to leave him to himself, and I longed for your return, that he might have your ladyship to comfort him, for I am sure he is seriously ill."

The heart of Virginia could not resist this appeal of Amy. Dismissing her compassionate attendant, she entered the room which contained her sleeping lover. With light though trembling steps, Virginia stole towards the couch; the handkerchief had fallen from his face, which was moistened by his tears, and a heavy sigh escaped him, as he breathed forth the name of his beloved.

Virginia bent over him—a tear fell on his forehead—her soft and balmy breath moved the bright locks which hung disordered on his cheeks. He started, awoke, and clasped her to his bosom. Both were for some minutes silent. At length Virginia said—"Are you ill, Arthur? Amy told me that you was seriously indisposed. The poor girl com-

municated her fears to me, and I felt it impossible to retire to my chamber without seeing you."

"Bless you, dearest Virginia! may Heaven bless and direct you for the best! I am, indeed, unwell, my love. I have seen Alicia Glendore—have heard of the fatal change in your opinions—and yet I exist!"

"But you do not condemn me, Arthur?" replied Virginia, wiping away the tears of anguish which streamed down her face: "you do not condemn me? you must surely think as I do?"

Herbert still held her trembling form in his arms; his eyes were fixed on hers with unextinguishable tenderness—"Oh, no, my Virginia!" he cried, "I do not condemn that lovely delicacy of mind which suggested to you the painful bar to our mutual happiness; yet as our own hearts feel conscious that no guilt is attached to either of our parents, as we know that the impropriety can only exist in
the

the public opinion, do not, my angelic, my betrothed wife, suffer that amiable delicacy, which I so highly admire, to carry you too far on the side of female propriety. Our hearts are already united, *they* at least can never be divided; the world seems to have forgotten the circumstance which has given us so much uneasiness; and if you still fear lest chance should revive it, let us leave England, my Virginia—let us reside abroad. That country shall be mine which enables me to enjoy the felicity of my Virginia's presence. Say, my beloved, will your affection bear this test? am I worthy so great a proof of your tenderness?"

"Oh, do not ask me, do not appeal to my affection!" replied Virginia, tenderly; "for that would prompt me to run every hazard, so as I might with honour become yours."

Herbert strained her to his breast, in rapturous gratitude—"So dearly do I love you, so sacredly do I value your re-

pose," said he, "that I call Heaven to witness, my Virginia, that I would not persuade you to any act of which, at a future moment, I thought you might repent. Although the idea of losing you has already cost me so much agony, yet, if I supposed that you would ever regret your present condescension, or breathe a sigh for having become a voluntary exile from England, and from your friends, even now I would give up this dear and precious hand, I would consign myself to solitary wretchedness, but I would not ask you to share it with me."

This fresh instance of generous affection totally subdued the grateful heart of Virginia, and called forth an unreserved explanation of what had passed that morning between herself and Alicia—"I will not take to myself," said she, "the merit of refined feeling. My mind was at that time too much occupied by my mother, to think of myself.

I was

I was enjoying the luxury of my own happy thoughts, when Alicia's advice broke the charm, and awoke me to a new sense of my situation. I felt that her reasoning was just, and I resolved to act with that propriety of conduct which she pointed out as being my duty. I had not courage to see or to speak to you, in the state of mind I was then in, and Alicia with great kindness proposed to break the intelligence to you herself."

A transient frown clouded the fine features of Herbert. He disliked the want of candour Alicia had displayed, and thought he discovered more of artifice than kindness in her advice to himself and to Virginia. But he was silent on the subject, lest he should condemn her unjustly. Turning to Virginia, smilingly—"And what, my beloved, was the advice of lady Deterville? She is, I know, your confidant; did *she* counsel you to abandon me?"

"Oh, no! lady Deterville is one of

your warmest advocates. She was half-angry with me for not consenting to go over to India, and positively declared that I was a stranger to love, since I was capable of forming any opinion inimical to your happiness."

"Poor lady Deterville!" sighed the noble-minded Arthur. "I am grateful for her good wishes, but I fear that she is the slave of love's unhallowed fires, and that she will ere long become its victim. But, my sweet Virginia, are you not perfectly convinced by this time, that there exists no *real* cause to prevent our nuptials?"

"Alas, my dear Arthur! I dare not decide too hastily upon a subject of such importance. I feel that I have not courage to remain in England, where I may be liable to be insulted at any public party. If I become your wife, I should wish to reside abroad; but I can never consent to leave my dear mother—she must be the companion of our travels."

Herbert

Herbert felt overjoyed that he had got her to yield thus far to his wishes, when lord de Morville interrupted by his presence their conversation; and Arthur took leave of his Virginia, with far different sensations from those which he had experienced on first entering the house.

On Virginia's retiring to her bedroom, Amy presented to her a letter, which, on opening, contained the following lines :—

“ Titania once more addresses her beloved favourite. Not as before does she present her with the orient pearl, but with a still more valuable proof of her love and remembrance. Receive, dearest Virginia, that which will prevent your applying to the generosity of your brother, and which will enable you to procure all the necessary
wants

wants for your approaching change of situation. Sweet girl, may the felicity which awaits you be as permanent as will be my prayers! and may Heaven shower down upon you and your Arthur its choicest gifts !”

Virginia immediately recognized the hand-writing to be the same as that of her former letter. The envelope enclosed a bank-bill for three thousand pounds; and her heart acknowledged, with affectionate gratitude, the well-timed present of her mother. Though it was late, she went to the apartment of her brother, unable to sleep until she had made him acquainted with their parent's goodness. She found him busily engaged in answering a letter which he had himself received from the same hand. Virginia read as follows:—

“ MY

“ MY BELOVED SON,

“ I feel that language is inadequate to convey to you the grateful admiration to which your conduct to your dear neglected sister has given birth. The nobleness of your soul was proved at the death of your father, and the disinterested readiness with which you acknowledged her claim to your affection, shewed you to be worthy of all the fond pride of your mother. Accept then, my son, from that mother who, until now, has never dared to give way to her wishes, a trifle towards replenishing the purse of a minor. Should it be insufficient for your wants, remember that you have a parent living, who, through the generosity of her best friend, is enabled to gratify her maternal feelings, out of her own private property.

MARIA VIRGINIA HERBERT.”

The young lord, whose circumstances were thus unexpectedly made easy, now shewed to his sister the liberal donation of his mother: and Virginia, as she saw him exultingly unfold bank-notes to the amount of five thousand pounds, could not help gently reminding him of his promise to relinquish for ever the fatal amusement of gambling.

Lord de Morville heard her without any appearance of displeasure; he embraced her tenderly, at the same time assuring her that he still kept to his resolution.

Virginia, happy at the idea of the pleasure which her brother seemed to enjoy, gave credit to his assertion, nor once imagined that the young lord might find a still more criminal way of dissipating his money, than by pursuing that vice to which she had such a particular aversion.

CHAPTER VI.



THE day before Mrs. Trelawny's masked ball, Virginia was agreeably surprised by the arrival of Mrs. Meredith and Winifred. "Well, my dear girl," said the old lady, embracing her, "are you not pleased to see us? I came on purpose to go with you to the masquerade. Indeed I did not think it quite proper to allow you to go there without my protection; and Winny would not stay behind, though Joseph Warburton and her father said every thing that they could think of to make her remain."

Virginia was indeed pleased at the sight of her friends, yet she could not help smiling at the excuse the old lady made in order to conceal her own private wishes

wishes to make one among the gay assembly at Mrs. Trelawny's. She quickly informed them of the recent discovery which gave her so invaluable a mother. Their surprise could only be equalled by their joy.

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Meredith, with an affected air of superior discernment, "I always thought there was something very strange about Mrs. Herbert. It was hardly to be supposed that an indifferent person would have bestowed on you those large and beautiful pearls. I thought I should find it out some time or other."

"But, my dear madam, you could not possibly divine that my mother still lived, much less that Mrs. Herbert had once been the countess de Morville."

"No, no, I did not exactly think that," said Mrs. Meredith; "but I conjectured that she was very nearly related to your mother, though she might not choose to own it. Well, to be sure, what a cruel tyrant your father
must

must have been, and what an angel of a man was governor Herbert ! but he must have cared very little for money, to have paid down twenty thousand pounds for nothing."

Winifred's tears had fallen fast during the recital of Virginia, yet she smiled through them sweetly on her friend, as she congratulated her upon being restored to the arms of such a mother as Mrs. Herbert. Her aunt declared that she should not rest until she had paid her a visit ; and as her own horses were fatigued by the journey, Virginia ordered her carriage to be got ready, proposing that Winifred and herself should accompany the old lady to Mrs. Herbert.

Lord de Morville, in particular, appeared gratified by the return of his guests. He seemed anxious to make himself even more fascinating than usual ; yet Virginia imagined that his spirits were partly forced, for though they were
naturally

naturally high, they were never boisterous; but now he was even noisy—a circumstance which did not escape the notice of Winifred; while her aunt attributed it to the present of five thousand pounds which he had received from his mother, and to his expectation of being still further assisted from the same quarter. She expressed great satisfaction at the moderation of Virginia's wishes, who, notwithstanding, that she might now be excused from asking the advice of Mrs. Meredith in the important affair of expending her money, yet chose to pay her adopted mother the compliment of requesting her to procure for her all that was requisite against the celebration of her nuptials.

This was a task most grateful to the old lady, who, with Winifred, had promised to be present on the occasion, as well as to assist at the birthday of lord de Morville.

Virginia had intimated a desire that
the

the dress of Winifred should be her gift, and that, as she was to be her bridesmaid, it should be worthy of the donor. She had already ordered for her friend a valuable set of pearls, and as she intended to leave England shortly after her marriage, she proposed giving to her also her own miniature, set with brilliants.

To this Mrs. Meredith, who hated all unnecessary expence, objected, saying, that the picture of Virginia would be sufficient without the jewels; but in this instance her ladyship was not to be persuaded; and the miniature was accordingly sent to the jeweller, to be set as she had directed.

The determination of Arthur to travel immediately after his marriage, was approved of by lord de Morville and Mrs. Herbert, who readily agreed to accompany them; but it was strongly opposed by Mrs. Meredith and Winifred. The former had made up her mind that they should inhabit Meredith House,
which

which would be vacant in the ensuing summer; and the latter felt that nothing could compensate for the total loss of so dear a friend's society.

At length the evening of the masquerade arrived. Mrs. Herbert dined in St. James's Place, that she might enjoy the sight of viewing them in their different characters. Lord de Morville seemed out of spirits, notwithstanding all his endeavours to rally them. He was unusually silent during dinner, frequently regarding his mother and sister with melancholy attention; and to the tender inquiries of Mrs. Herbert he replied, with an embarrassed air, that he was rather indisposed, but should soon be better. His indisposition, however, seemed rather to increase than to diminish, from the watchful affection of his mother; and when she said that she should expect lady Deterville to join her family party next day, his agitation was so visible, that all present became alarmed, lest he
was

was more unwell than he chose to acknowledge. Convinced of the necessity of forcing his spirits, and of dissembling his real feelings, lord de Morville instantly assumed a gaiety at that moment foreign to his heart. The ladies retired to dress, and Arthur prepared to return home for the same purpose.

“De Morville,” said Herbert, rising from his chair, “something extraordinary oppresses you. It is not the indisposition of the *body* which has thus affected your natural liveliness. Perhaps, my dear brother, for soon, I trust, you will become really my brother, it is some pecuniary affair which distresses you. If such is the case, why have you hesitated to make use of my purse?” then going towards the fire, he first shewed the young lord his own acknowledgements for the money he had borrowed, then threw them into the flames—“Remember, my friend, that you are no longer my debtor. If I can be of service to
you

you under any fresh difficulty, command me to the utmost of my power."

He was going, when lord de Morville, recovering from the surprise occasioned by this unexpected generosity of Arthur, hastily caught his arm—"Stay," said he, "best of men! stay, and receive the poor effusions of a grateful but erring heart. I am unworthy of your fraternal affection—unworthy of your friendship; yet I am fully sensible of the value of a brother like yourself. Virginia's love must repay you for all your goodness to me. May Heaven bless you both! and my mother, my dearest mother! how will her heart beat when she knows the extent of her son's misconduct!"

"Nay, dear de Morville, do not accuse yourself so harshly," replied Herbert. "Such serious reflections are not suitable to the amusement of to-night. Whatever may have been your faults, thank Heaven! they have not grown
into

into vices. A short time will put you in possession of your fortune, and give to me my beloved Virginia. Our mother will accompany us abroad; and if we are as much the objects of your regard as we hope we are, our happiness will be still more lively, our home more cheerful, if enlivened by your presence. In half-an-hour I shall return to you—let me find you as gay as ever.”

Herbert stayed not for his reply, but leaping into his carriage, drove rapidly home, that he might assume the attire of Selim, and join his lovely Fatima.

Mrs. Meredith, as an old mendicant, greatly amused Mrs. Herbert. She looked and acted the character to perfection; her dress was perfectly in style, for she had not a single article about her, except her basket and its contents, that was worth a shilling. Her gown and quilted petticoat had once been black bombazeen, but they were now grown rusty with age; her arms were covered by the old

stocking legs which she wore when weeding in the garden of the cottage; and her hat was the same old beaver, without any nap left to bespeak its former goodness. Her grey locks fell from beneath a plain cloth night-cap; and her shoulders were covered by a sort of cloak, made by Amy out of the faded green baize that had once been the bed of Virginia's favourite cat. She had an apron put together out of a number of bits of coloured calico. But what most pleased her was her neat little wicker basket, full of threadcases, pincushions, &c. which, from the prettiness of the workmanship, she felt assured she should dispose of to advantage. It was impossible for any human being to look a more complete beggar-woman than Mrs. Meredith; and never was a character sustained with greater ease and spirit than that selected by this singular, yet amiable old lady.

Winifred made a very pretty flower-girl,

girl, and Arthur Herbert goodnaturedly supplied her with nosegays, that nothing might sour the temper of her aunt, or prevent her from enjoying, to the fullest extent, the hilarity of the evening. Virginia, as before, made a lovely Fatima, and her brother a graceful and highly-interesting Alonzo. Thus attired, they on the return of Selim took leave of Mrs. Herbert, and proceeded to the gay abode of Mrs. Trelawny, first calling on lady Deterville, who, as Cora, was waiting their arrival.

Mrs. Trelawny was unmasked, that she might be known to her numerous visitors, all of whom she received with the dignified courtesy of the character she had assumed, although there was but little of the virgin modesty in her looks which marked the maiden queen of the sixteenth century. Round her chair of state stood several lovely young women, as her attendants, the daughters of gentlemen of small fortunes, who were

delighted to be admitted to her parties, and who were ever ready to make themselves serviceable to Mrs. Trelawny. At a little distance stood the earl of Essex, whose good-natured voice, and quick, sparkling eye, were alone sufficient to betray Mr. Trelawny.

The apartments were splendidly illuminated, and the decorations of the ball-room extremely elegant. Mrs. Trelawny expressed herself much gratified at seeing her theatrical friends, who had so obligingly attended to her wishes. "But where," said she, "is the mighty Abomelique?"

At this moment sir David appeared, and with him a most graceful Calypso, leaning on the arm of a youthful Telemachus. It was lady Elizabeth Lester and the gentleman whose addresses in secret she encouraged, and whom, under the favour of a mask, she had now chosen to be her companion for the night.

Virginia was much entertained by the
novelty

novelty of the scene, the variety of characters, and the singularity of some of their dresses. Her spirits rose in proportion to the pleasure she derived from the hilarity of the company, and she danced with all the vivacity so natural to her disposition, and so fascinating to those who, like herself, entered into the animating spirit of the amusement. Herbert bestowed great praise on her performance, and Virginia was happy.

Alicia, as Elvira, watched all the movements of the unsuspecting Virginia. She saw her closely attended by Herbert, and she trembled lest the last of her diabolical efforts had failed of success. After conversing with her for a few minutes, and passing through the rooms, that her arrival might be known to a small circle of her acquaintance, she unobserved withdrew to a private apartment, where, unknown to all but Mrs. Trelawny, she quickly assumed the sombre habiliments of a nun, and with:

crucifix and rosary re-entered the ball-room. Thus disguised, she followed the steps of her once-loved friend and her intended husband, and heard enough of their conversation to convince her that Virginia, in spite of the obstacle raised to blight her happiness, was still determined to unite her fate with that of Arthur. This however must at all hazards be prevented, and she paused to consider whether the present scene could not furnish her with a favourable opportunity to wound the slumbering delicacy of Virginia. She recognized the niece of sir Charles Blandford, as an eastern princess, and a thought immediately struck her, that she might be useful to her plans.

Virginia and Herbert had been much annoyed by the persevering attentions of the nun. They had made every inquiry about her, but without success ; the only person in the room who could inform them who she was chose to pretend

tend ignorance ; and they continued to be haunted by her presence, without the power of getting rid of their troublesome follower.

Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Glendore kept up with great spirit the characters of Inkle and Yarico. They sang several excellent songs, and afforded infinite pleasure to the company. Lord de Morville and the countess, with lady Elizabeth and her humble admirer, and a group of motley characters, now environed the beautiful Fatima. All pressed her to sing, but she timidly refused, until her brother entreated her to gratify the assembly by the pleasing air of ‘ When pensive I thought on my love.’ Virginia was never in finer voice. The praises she received made her shrink behind the admiring crowd, and gladly avail herself of joining her old friend the beggar-woman.

“ See !” cried Mrs. Meredith, exultingly holding up her empty basket, “ I
 I 4 have

have sold all my stock. Very well for a first beginning. How much do you think I have made?"

"I cannot tell, I am sure," replied Virginia, laughing. "Have you been equally successful, my pretty flower-girl?"

"Winny is too shy," said her aunt; "she might have sold all her nosegays twice over, had she but assumed courage to offer them. But, my dear child, what think you of my getting five pounds?"

"Is it possible!" cried Virginia, in a tone of surprise; "why they were not worth half that sum."

"Oh, but many who purchased them knew who I was, and guessed that they were done by you. Sir David besought me to give him a scissar-sheath of your making, and threw into my basket a one pound note for the trifle which was sanctified by your touch."

"Sir David is extremely gallant, as well as liberal," remarked Herbert, inwardly

wardly wondering how a woman of so much good sense, and such delightful manners, could degrade herself by her unhappy love of money, as well to draw upon herself the contempt of those who were unacquainted with her real value. Seeing at a little distance a vacant couch, he led Virginia towards it. They had not been seated many minutes, before they perceived their unknown tormentor, the nun, with another mask, among a crowd of haymakers, housemaids, and other characters, who were listening to a duet, sung by two female ballad-singers, whose poverty of attire could not conceal the native elegance of high life.

The song had ceased, and the nun and her companion remained alone. Their backs were turned towards Virginia, who was conversing with Herbert. She stopped suddenly, as the sound of her own name crossed her ear.

“The voice of lady Susan is much

sweeter than her sister's," said the eastern princess, "but neither can compare to the rich mellow tones of lady Virginia Sedley. Poor girl! I pity her from my soul; what a sad thing it is that she should suffer for the faults of her parents!"

"It is indeed," replied the nun, in a feigned voice; "your uncle sir Charles has told you, I suppose, the whole affair. Pray did not the countess her mother run off with an officer in the guards?"

"Oh no, the person for whom lady de Morville left her husband and children was a Mr. Herbert, who went out to India immediately after, and who was father to the gentleman to whom lady Virginia is betrothed. Poor girl! how lamentable is her fate! Unconscious of the crime committed by her mother, she has innocently suffered herself to love the man whom, above all others, delicacy and wounded pride ought to have

have made her shun. It is impossible that she can ever appear in public as the wife of Mr. Herbert."

Virginia breathed with difficulty. She caught the arm of Herbert, as he was in the act of rising, who, pained to the soul by this unfortunate discourse, pressed her hand and reseated himself, as the nun and her companion now mingled with the crowd.

"Do not leave me," said Virginia in a low voice; "I am extremely faint, but I shall be better soon. Who can that nun be, whose ill-timed curiosity awakened the good-natured pity of Miss Blandford? I once thought that the tones of her voice were not unknown to me."

"It is of no consequence, my beloved," replied Arthur, while the trembling of his form denoted the contrary; "our own hearts are satisfied as to the innocence of *her* whom the thoughtless lo-

quacity of Miss Blandford has unintentionally censured.”

“ Ah,” cried Virginia, shuddering, “ but how many Miss Blandfords may I not meet with in my passage through life ?”

“ Think of it no more, my sweet love,” said Herbert, hastily ; “ in a short time we shall be removed from this country, and from all who have the power and the inclination to wound our feelings ; and if my undying tenderness, my devoted attachment to you and yours, can solace you for the loss of your early friends, my Virginia may with safety confide her happiness to my keeping. But let me fetch you some refreshment, or will you prefer accompanying me to a less noisy apartment ?”

Virginia chose the latter, and Herbert led his trembling bride to one of the chambers allotted for refreshments. After she had taken some, he inquired if she

she

she was sufficiently recovered to allow of his leaving her? “I wish,” said he, “to see, for a few minutes, one of the masks, and will return to you almost immediately.”

The room in which Virginia was seated was, fortunately for her, at this time unoccupied, except by those who attended to the various articles of refreshment. Her mind was fully employed by the painful conversation to which she had been obliged to listen, and she unconsciously breathed a deep sigh, as she felt that to preserve her own character unsullied, she must resign the object of her fondest affection.

From these agonizing reflections she was roused by a well-known voice, whose silvery sweetness stole like celestial harmony on the astonished ear of the fair mourner, as it said—“Grieve not, my Virginia, at the loss of thy soul’s dearest treasure. To mourn is
common

common to mortality; but you will soon be happy—happy as I now am.”

Virginia turned her head; she looked towards the end of the couch, and saw the graceful form of her beloved Marian Glendore, such as it was before the canker of disease had stolen the sparkling lustre from her soft blue eyes. Virginia gazed on her with fearful joy; the snowy whiteness of her vestments, the transparent hue of her complexion, the heavenly radiance which seemed to hover round her form, dazzled the eyes of Virginia, while, as if spell-bound, she could only stretch her arms towards the first friend of her heart. The seraphic smile of Marian, the upraised hands, as if in the attitude of calling down blessings on the dear companion of her childhood, caused an awful sensation to pervade the soul of Virginia. Again the angelic figure spoke, and Virginia bent forward to catch the melodious sound of Marian's voice.

“ A new

“ A new trouble awaits you, sister of my affection ; a new wound from the hands of those you love ; yet grieve not, my Virginia, you will soon be happy—happy as I now am.”

Footsteps approached ; Virginia turned hastily to see if it was Arthur ; then, casting a glance towards the end of the couch, she perceived it vacant. Convinced that no person could have left the apartment without her seeing them, she uttered a fearful scream, and fell lifeless into the arms of Herbert.

The terror of her lover was excessive, yet he had the prudence to take off her mask, and with the assistance of some of the female domestics, who applied the usual remedies, he had the delight of seeing her revive. Casting a look of fear round the chamber, Virginia clung close to the bosom of her affianced husband, as she asked, in a faltering voice, if he had seen Marian Glendore.

Herbert,

Herbert, who thought that her senses were wandering, and who feared lest some new vexation had occurred during his short absence, endeavoured to persuade her that she must be under the influence of an illusion, caused by her illness and the perturbed state of her mind.

“No, my dear Arthur,” replied Virginia, withdrawing her hand from her burning forehead, and casting another glance of fearful inquiry round the apartment, “if ever I saw my beloved Marian, I have seen her this evening. It was there she sat. Oh! never shall I forget the angelic expression of her lovely countenance, never shall I cease to think of her mysterious words.”

She then repeated them to Herbert, who felt a kind of superstitious awe creep through his veins. At first he had thought Virginia delirious, but he was now convinced that she had indeed

deed seen some person who had spoken to her, and whom she had mistaken for her favourite Marian.

“ I am better now,” said Virginia, rising, “ and will return to the ball-room. I shall not be satisfied unless I search the public apartments—unless I speak to Alicia.”

A frown was now visible on the face of Herbert, who, as well as Virginia, was unmasked, yet he was silent. They now passed through the different rooms which were thrown open for company, but vain was their search, no Marian appeared. Indeed Herbert, who knew too well the sad state of her health, felt the absolute impossibility of its being her. Yet it might be the spirit of that pure and innocent creature whom the Almighty had permitted to become visible to the friend most dear to her while living, to warn her of approaching evil, and to console her with the assurance of her still being happy.

Virginia,

Virginia, in trembling accents, inquired of Alicia, who by this had changed her nun's dress, if she had seen Marian, positively affirming that she had not only beheld her, but that she had heard the sound of her voice. The heart of Alicia felt a sudden chill, as the probability of her sister's death crossed her mind. Reuben also partook of Alicia's fears, but he strove to convince Virginia that she must have been deceived.

“ Ah, too surely I have been deceived in supposing it could be my beloved Marian,” cried Virginia, leaning heavily on the arm of Arthur as her weakness increased; “ it was the shade of my adored friend—not herself.”

Virginia would again have fainted but for the timely assistance of Reuben and Dorinda, the latter of whom supported her head on her bosom with a real kindness, which called a blush on the now pale cheek of Alicia—pale from the double fear of having lost an amiable sister, and
of

of having been likewise discovered in her nun's attire by Arthur.

Virginia now expressed a wish to return home, and requested Herbert to seek Mrs. Meredith, and to inform either her brother or lady Deterville, that, feeling herself indisposed, she had declined staying to supper.

The old beggar-woman and her pretty niece were quickly discovered by Arthur, who, after a fruitless search for lord de Morville and the countess, returned to his Virginia. Winifred begged to accompany her friend home, to which Mrs. Meredith, who was unwilling to miss the delicacies of a good supper, consented, as Virginia had spoken lightly of her indisposition, and wholly concealed from her the cause of it.

Herbert returned with Virginia and Winifred to St. James's Place. He strove by the most tender eloquence to dissuade Virginia from believing that she had actually seen the shade of Marian

rian

rian Glendore, wishing her to attribute the whole to a disordered imagination, but Virginia persisted that the words she had heard could not be an illusion, and Winifred now joined her in the belief that her beloved friend was no longer an inhabitant of this world. Finding it impossible to change the opinion of Virginia, Herbert, after promising to be with them early next day, took his leave, in order that they might seek that repose of which Virginia in particular seemed to be so much in need.

CHAPTER VII.



WHEN Herbert left Virginia for a few minutes in the refreshment-room, it was with an intention to discover, if possible, who was that tormenting nun whose unfortunate question had called forth a reply, still more mortifying, from Miss Blandford. From a single turn of the body, he suspected it could be no other than Alicia Glendore. Having once admitted this idea, he felt it necessary for his repose that he should ascertain the fact. The nun was hastily leaving the ball-room as Herbert entered it; he therefore stationed himself where he could watch her movements, and saw her ascend the staircase leading to the private apartments. Herbert waited with

with painful anxiety ; he absolutely trembled lest his suspicions should be confirmed—lest he should discover that Alicia was capable of abusing the confidence he had ever placed in her sincerity, and of acting with deliberate treachery towards the friend of her childhood.

Alicia Glendore at length descended in the dress of Elvira. In her hand she held her mask, and her countenance was smilingly beautiful. At the sight of Arthur she started back, conscious of being betrayed. He gave her *one* look, and, mingling with the crowd, hurried to join his Virginia.

Amidst all the various trials to which human nature is subject, there can scarcely be found one more severe than that which discovers to us the perfidy of a chosen friend. Alicia was no longer the woman whom he had deemed worthy to become a model to her sex. He was ignorant of the motives which could induce

induce her to adopt so base a conduct, but he was aware that she must be the secret enemy of Virginia, and that her object was to disunite him from the idol of his affections. He felt also that it was but just to put Virginia on her guard against the pretended kindness of Alicia; and he therefore went there the next morning with that intention.

Virginia had passed a disturbed and sleepless night. The words of Marian still vibrated on her ear; the form of Marian still floated before her sight, in all its dazzling and celestial splendour. She rang early for Amy, who, fearing lest she should be the bearer of ill news, tardily obeyed the summons of her mistress. Lord de Morville had not been at home all night; his valet also was absent, but he had given to Amy a letter from his master, which he desired might be delivered to her lady the next morning. The singularity of this circumstance alarmed the affectionate Amy, who

who now slowly entered the chamber of Virginia, followed by Winifred, to whom she had communicated her fears.

Virginia no sooner perceived the hand-writing of her brother, than, dismissing Amy, she threw herself on the bosom of Winifred, whose trembling limbs half refused to support this additional weight. "Oh, my friend!" cried Virginia, in a voice of hopeless grief, "I feel that the new trouble of which Marian warned me is now at hand. I dread to see the contents of this letter, lest they should discover to me the guilty weakness of two dear loved beings, whom, in spite of their errors, will ever be dear to me. Read, Winifred, read, and end my suspense."

"I cannot, indeed," sobbed Winifred. "I have not half your fortitude."

Virginia pressed her lips to the moist cheek of her friend, and then, by an effort of desperate courage, broke the seal, and read as follows; not, however, without

out several interruptions, owing to the violence of her feelings.

“ When this is given to you, my dearest Virginia, I shall be many miles distant from town. My silence respecting my journey will perhaps betray to you the cause. The warm affection of your nature may induce you to pity your unhappy brother, who, hurried on by the impetuosity of his passions, has at length become their sacrifice. But what will my dear mother say? Plead for me, Virginia; say every thing that can induce her to pardon the guilt of her son, who looks up to her as to a superior being, and who, whatever may be his errors, cannot place among them want of filial affection.

“ My intention is to quit England for a time. In the possession of her whom my soul adores, and for whose

VOL. IV. K love

Love I have exiled myself from relations who are most dear to me, could I but draw round me a small circle of friends, I should not have a wish ungratified. Dearest Virginia, I have a thousand things to say to you, a thousand little requests to make, but I am pressed for time; my heart and my head are both full. God bless you, and my noble friend Herbert! Remember me in your prayers. When I am safe beyond the pursuit of those whom I have injured, you shall hear from me.

DE MORVILLE."

"And is it come to this?" at length exclaimed Virginia. "Oh, Winifred! how keenly will my mother feel this new calamity! Would to God that my dear brother had never known the beautiful Isabella, or that he had known her sooner! This then is the trouble of which

which I was warned ; yet I was to be happy ; but not in *this* world."

" Oh, say not so, my dear Virginia," cried Winifred, embracing her ; " say not so, or my heart will break. Had lady Deterville loved lord de Morville with that idolatry of which she boasted herself capable, she would never have yielded to his pleadings, since they have dishonoured herself, and torn him from the arms of his family and friends."

" Love," replied Virginia, " in the breast of some beings, seems to be a distinct and different passion to that which glows in the bosom of others. I knew of my brother's fatal attachment to the countess, and had every reason to believe that she returned it ; but I had hoped that the principles of my friend would preserve her from a violation of her duties. Poor lord Deterville ! who shall break to him the dreadful tidings ? Heaven guard the life of my dear, im-

prudent brother, and preserve him from the just displeasure of the earl and of sir David !”

A summons from Mrs. Meredith made them hasten to the breakfast-parlour, where Virginia confided to her the news of her brother's elopement with the countess. The morality of the old lady was greatly shocked at this discovery. She descanted for half-an-hour on the wickedness of the age, and the depravity of the rising generation, which she affirmed was infinitely more abandoned than in her days. “ Good Heaven ! what will become of them ?” said she. “ Even should they succeed in escaping the vengeance of the husband and brother, how can lord de Morville afford to pay the heavy damages which will be laid against him ? Why it will almost ruin him ! Well, little did I think that all my economical savings would come to this. It would have
been

been far better for lord de Morville to have married Winny, than to have run away with another man's wife."

"Some evil destiny seems to hang over us both," replied Virginia, mournfully; "some singular fatality attends us. Alas! my mother, my dear mother! I fear that her sufferings are not yet ended."

Mrs. Mercedith, who did not want for humanity where her purse was not concerned, proposed to call on Mrs. Herbert, and break to her the melancholy intelligence. This offer was most gratefully received by Virginia, who was in fact too severely affected, both in mind and body, to perform so painful a task. She dreaded lest she should receive a visit from sir David Montgomery; and finding herself wholly unable to see company, gave orders to be denied to every body but the Herberts.

When Arthur arrived he was alarmed by her appearance, which denoted every

symptom of fever. She put into his hand the letter of her brother, and tremblingly awaited his opinion of its contents. Herbert was not surprised; he was nevertheless extremely hurt at the fatal consequences of his friend's unhappy attachment. He tried to soothe her fears for the safety of her brother's life, and earnestly besought her to send immediately for medical advice.

Virginia faintly smiled on her lover as she consented to his wishes; but he saw, with all the heightened terror of affection, that her indisposition was not a slight one. To speak to her now of the treachery of Alicia would only be to add to a distress which seemed already insupportable, and he therefore postponed it until a more favourable opportunity.

Virginia was in truth so extremely unwell, that she was obliged to retire to her chamber, whither she was accompanied by Winifred and the faithful Amy,
 who

who made a variety of excuses to remain near the person of her beloved mistress, and who thought every minute an hour until the arrival of doctor Mowbray. Notwithstanding the skill of the physician, and the watchful attention of Mrs. Meredith and Winifred, Virginia was confined to her bed for two days, during which time her distracted mother never quitted her side, scarcely allowing herself the relief of half an hour's repose.

On the evening of the third day Virginia was allowed to sit up, and Arthur was admitted to her presence. Surrounded by four beings who loved her with the warmest affection, Virginia endeavoured for their sakes to appear cheerful, but the remembrance of her self-exiled, her dishonoured brother, pressed heavy on her heart; while the uncertainty of his fate called the tears into her eyes, in spite of all her efforts to the contrary.

It was now that Dorinda begged
K 4 permission

permission to see her intended sister. She came alone, and Virginia felt highly gratified by her visit, since it arose solely from affection ; for Dorinda was not of a nature to feign a kindness she did not feel. Out of delicacy to Virginia, she forbore before her to mention the name of lord de Morville, but when she was absent, she scrupled not to fix all the blame of the affair on lady Deterville and her gay companion, whom she affirmed had been the chief cause of the young lord's ruin. Alicia was of the same opinion, but she had herself sufficient cause of regret in the consciousness of having betrayed herself to Herbert, whose esteem must necessarily be forfeited by the discovery of her duplicity. Unable to encounter the mild reproaches of her deluded friend, or the silent upbraidings of Arthur's eloquent eyes, she gladly availed herself of the plausible excuse of her sister's death to remain unseen. The amiable Marian died at
 nearly

nearly the same hour as that on which she appeared to the bosom friend of her childhood.

Alicia, false and treacherous as she was, yet wanted courage to inform Virginia of this event. At her earnest entreaty Reuben took upon himself this unpleasant office. His name was a passport to the presence of Virginia, who, languid and weak, was now for the first time since her illness lying on a couch in the drawing-room, attended by Winifred.

She rose at his entrance, and with a smile which recalled to the mind of Reuben the sunny days of his early years, extended to him that fair hand which once he had hoped to have called his own, but which now glittered with the jewelled ring of Herbert. Reuben's eyes were filled with tears as the purport of his visit crossed his mind. He seated himself by the side of Virginia; he still held her soft hand in his.

The dejection of his ever lively countenance awakened the fears of Virginia. "Ah!" said she, bursting into tears, "I would thank you for the kindness of this visit, but that I already guess its mournful cause. My beloved Marian is no more! She is happy! Friend of my heart! dear companion of my youth! even in thy last moments thy Virginia was not forgotten! thy angel spirit still hovered over the being whom in life you held dear. Thy warning voice foretold my recent calamity, yet consoled me with the assurance that I too should soon be happy, happy as thou now art, my own dearest Marian!"

Winifred flung her arms round the neck of Virginia—"If you would not kill me," said she, sobbing, "banish from your mind those unmeaning words, or rather put on them their proper construction. As the wife of our much esteemed Arthur, you will soon, I hope, be the happiest of women."

Virginia

Virginia shook her head—"It is not in this world, Winifred, that the children of lady de Morville are to find happiness." Then turning hastily to Reuben, who sat speechless from his emotions, she said—"Tell me, my dear friend, I conjure you, what is said with respect to my unhappy brother? Is lord Deterville——?" She paused, then assuming courage—"Have you seen sir David Montgomery?"

"I saw him for a few minutes the day after the masquerade," replied Reuben, with evident embarrassment. "He was of course completely cut up, and bent on following your brother. I used every argument to dissuade him from it. Lord Deterville, I have since heard, is too ill to leave the country. The world throws all the blame on lady Elizabeth Lester, who has not ventured to appear in public since that unfortunate transaction. No man can more sincerely feel for the present situation of lord de

Morville than I do, since I am confident that his own sense of honour will damp the felicity which he has so vainly expected to find."

Virginia sighed deeply. She loved her brother with a tenderness, the want of which might have been excused, considering the lateness of their intimacy with each other. She loved also the weak and imprudent countess, and though she deemed it next to impossible, she prayed fervently to Heaven to avert its wrath, to pardon their sin, and to permit them to be happy.

Five days had elapsed since the elopement of lord de Morville with lady Deterville, when Virginia was sitting with her mother, who, since his absence, had resided with her daughter. They were conversing about the beloved criminal, and expressing the utmost solicitude for his safety, when a letter was delivered to Virginia, which the servant said had come by a private messenger. The direction

rection was in an unknown hand, but the letter contained in the envelop was from lord de Morville. Virginia in an ecstasy of pleasure kissed the almost unintelligible lines, and then gave them to Mrs. Herbert, who, in a low voice, read as follows :

“ Did I not know that my Virginia is the most affectionate of sisters, I should not dare to make known to her the wishes of a wretch like myself. I had hoped before this to have embarked for France, the only country worthy of affording a safe retreat to him, who, having violated the laws of hospitality, and seduced from her duty a confiding angel, dares not remain to pollute the ground of his native land.

“ The rapidity of our flight, and the struggles between love and duty, were more than my adored Isabella could sustain ; she sunk beneath the terrors for
my

my safety, and the horror of having lost the esteem of her beloved Virginia, and her revered and dear-loved Mrs. Herbert. I hastened with my treasure to the solitude of my own estate, fearing to embark while she continued so ill, and judging also that if we were pursued, our route by this means would not so easily be traced. At the castle of de Morville we are safe. I can rely on the fidelity of my domestics. But my Isabella still continues indisposed. Her mind is, I fear, the seat of her disorder. She dwells on your name as if it contained a hidden charm. Could she but once more receive your embrace, she thinks it would enable her to perform our destined voyage.

“ Virginia, will you verify the noble confidence I have in your affection? Will you leave privately the society of your Arthur? Will you hasten to speak peace to the friend who cannot exist under the loss of your love, and to receive●

receive the grateful embrace of your brother, who will not fail to remember while he lives so great a proof of your kindness.

DE MORVILLE."

"I will go to him immediately," cried Virginia; "I will convince him that he has only done justice to the heart of his sister. God forbid that I should refuse to speak comfort to the afflicted, perhaps, ere now, the penitent countess! Oh, my mother! you will account for my absence to Arthur; he will be satisfied with the motives of my journey; he will not love me less for my readiness to console my unhappy brother."

Mrs. Herbert embraced her daughter. "Dear Virginia," said the agitated mother, "much as I condemn the conduct of your brother, yet I cannot but sympathize in the present state of his feelings, which betray an evident horror of
the

the crime he has committed. The unfortunate companion of his guilt seems also to have suffered. Although she is the cause of my son's dishonour, yet when I consider that she was led like a lamb for sacrifice to the altar of wealth and ambition, that she was devoted to a perpetual ignorance of all that can attach a young heart to its partner for life, and that the sin into which she has been drawn brings with it a punishment more severe than any which the laws of my country can inflict, I am inclined to pity rather than to add to the self-upbraidings of her wounded conscience. My anxiety for the life of my son makes me wish him to quit England as early as possible ; yet I am alarmed lest you, my Virginia, should suffer by the journey."

" Oh, no, my mother, I already feel stronger, now that I have heard from my brother. Let me not lose a moment to put in execution his wishes."

" I must

“ I must accompany you, my dear girl,” replied Mrs. Herbert; “ you are too unwell to be trusted to the care of any one but myself. I must also see my son before he leaves England; but as the utmost precaution is necessary, lest our journey should transpire, and sir David, by that means, gain information of his retreat, we must consult with your old friend, Mrs. Meredith, and hear her opinion.”

Winifred sighed to accompany Virginia, but delicacy forbade her giving utterance to her wishes. Her aunt advised them to delay their journey until the dusk of the evening, when they could make use of her carriage, as it would be less likely to excite suspicion. The impatience of Virginia could hardly conform to this prudent advice. Though weak and still indisposed, she thought not of herself; and when she saw the eyes of her mother and of Herbert anxiously watching all her movements, she felt

felt the necessity of still further exertion, to calm their affectionate apprehensions.

Herbert, even more than his mother, for she was to be the companion of Virginia, dreaded the consequences of this journey, but he could not oppose it. Friendship and humanity forbade his expressing any disinclination to his Virginia's obeying the wishes of his imprudent friend. The heaviness of his heart was not lightened by the forced gaiety of his beloved, yet he felt some comfort in knowing that she would be attended by her mother, and that her absence was not to be extended beyond a week. Notwithstanding this, his dejection increased as he saw her take leave of Mrs. Meredith and Winifred. She smiled sweetly on him, as she saw his handsome features clouded by the painful emotions of bidding her adieu.

“Our separation will be short, my dear Arthur,” said she, as he pressed her fondly to his breast. “Shall I not carry
to

to my poor brother some assurance that you still remember him?"

"Say to him," replied Herbert, tenderly, "that he still lives in the heart of his friend. That however I may deplore the fatal weakness which has exiled him from his family, yet he may reckon confidently upon possessing all that my interest or affection can command. Tell him also, my dear mother, that since I can no longer expect to receive from his hand that of my adored Virginia, I shall at least flatter myself that our union will no longer be protracted until the time fixed on for its celebration, but that he will use all his influence to persuade his sister to become mine as soon as she returns to town."

Virginia's pale cheek became for a moment crimson at the mention of her nuptials. Again she felt the soft pressure of her lover's lips to hers. "My own dear Virginia," murmured Herbert,
"be

“be careful of your health. Think that on your recovery depends the welfare and happiness of your Arthur.” He then conducted her and Mrs. Herbert to the carriage, which soon conveyed the impatient travellers far beyond the noise and bustle of the metropolis.

It was midnight before the mother and sister of lord de Morville reached the castle which secreted the beloved criminals. The servants, who all believed that their master had been privately married to the fair object of his solicitude, were tutored how to act, in case of his retreat being discovered. The sound of carriage-wheels alarmed the porter, who immediately gave notice to his lordship’s valet that visitors were near; but the sweet tones of Virginia’s voice quickly dissipated their fears, and they flew to give admittance to one whom they all loved and respected. Dawson, his lordship’s valet, shewed the
weary

weary travellers into the drawing-room, and then ran to apprise his master of their arrival.

Lord de Morville was in his chamber, but he had not yet retired to rest. He had been reading to the countess, who, lulled by the soft tones of the voice which she idolized, had fallen into a gentle slumber, out of which she was awakened by the message of Dawson. It required all the eloquence of his lordship to allay her terror, on hearing that Mrs. Herbert was the companion of Virginia.

“Save me from her mild reproaches,” cried the agonized countess; “save me from her expressive eyes, de Morville. I shall die, if I have to encounter her just displeasure.”

“Calm your fears, my soul’s treasure,” replied the young lord, as he kissed off the trickling tears which fell from the jet black eyes of the lovely countess. “You shall not see any person but my sister.”

Again

Again embracing her, he with a countenance which betrayed shame and contrition, hastened to the drawing-room.

Virginia flung herself into the arms of her brother, whose excessive agitation prevented him from noticing the paleness of her looks. He pressed her to his bosom with grateful tenderness, then cast a glance of fearful inquiry towards his mother.

Mrs. Herbert passed her arms round both her children, and laying her cheek to the flushed face of her son, said—"I came here, my dear de Morville, not to increase your unhappiness, but to speak peace to your wounded mind, as well as to watch over our dear Virginia, who has been seriously indisposed ever since the night of the masquerade, and who is now very unfit to bear the fatigues of the journey, which affection alone induced her to perform."

Lord de Morville kissed alternately his mother and sister. "How," said he,
"can

“ can I prove to you my eternal gratitude for this generous attention to my wishes? Dearest Virginia,” he continued, looking on her with affectionate concern, “ I see that you are unwell. It will indeed increase my misery, if you should suffer from your goodness to such a wretch as I am. And you, my mother, my beloved, my revered mother, how unworthy have I proved myself of all your maternal kindness !”

“ Son of my fondest affection !” replied Mrs. Herbert, straining him to her breast with mournful tenderness ; “ the self-upbraidings of a noble mind, conscious of error, are its sufficient punishment. The past cannot be recalled ; the injury you have done to lord Deterville is beyond atonement ; that which you have entailed on the countess may admit of some amelioration. For you she has sacrificed all that can render a woman estimable in society ; she has therefore *on you* the strongest claim.

Love,

Love, which, when under the guidance of reason and honour, gives birth to all the cherished felicities of life, has proved her ruin. As you, my beloved son, are the cause of her crime, you cannot do less than to devote to her every hour of your existence. It is your undivided tenderness, your unceasing kindness, which can alone recompense her for falling a victim to her attachment."

"Fear not, my mother," cried the youthful penitent, as he indignantly dashed away the starting tears from off his burning cheek ; "fear not that I shall ever add the sin of ingratitude to the list of my failings. Isabella is dearer to me than language can express ; doubly dear since she has given me this last sad proof of her confiding affection. Oh, could I be capable for a moment of casting on her a look of harshness, of speaking the smallest sentence which could be construed into unkindness, I should deserve the contempt of all mankind. Too deeply
ly

ly does she feel the painfulness of her situation; yet the dear angel upbraids me not; all that she fears is for the safety of her betrayer."

Mrs. Herbert now expressed some fears lest Virginia, who still clung for support to the encircling arms of her brother, should be too much exhausted by remaining up any longer. After embracing and blessing her agitated son, she retired with her daughter to the apartments which had formerly been her own, when she was the mistress of the castle, and which her son had ordered to be well aired, under the idea that Virginia would not refuse to comply with his earnest request.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOTWITHSTANDING the fatigue which Virginia had undergone, and the lingering remains of fever which still dwelt in her frame, she arose at her accustomed hour; and forgetful that any cause existed which could render her visit unwelcome, proceeded to the rooms occupied by her brother. Light as was her step along the matted gallery, it was heard by the quick ear of lord de Morville, who met his sister in the anti-chamber; and after inquiring after her health and that of his mother, said—
“ Will my dear Virginia permit me to conduct her to the arms of one who pines to be assured that she is forgiven, for having occasioned her beloved friend so
much

much uneasiness? It is your own dear Isabella, my sister, who longs to embrace you, and who yet feels ashamed to meet the pure and innocent glance of her favourite."

"If the sight of me will afford any consolation to my misguided friend," replied Virginia, "I am ready to follow you to her presence."

Lord de Morville took the hand of his sister, who blushed as he conducted her into his own sleeping-room—"Alas!" thought she, "poor Isabella, I will not add to thy present humiliation, or increase the consciousness of thy degradation, by noticing whose room has now become thine."

Virginia entered; the countess rushed towards her, and falling at her feet, burst into an agony of tears as she embraced the knees of her trembling friend. Lord de Morville attempted to raise her, but she gently pushed him from her—"Here will I remain," said she, still

clasping the knees of Virginia, “until my adored friend assures me of her forgiveness. Never will I rise until the chosen sister of my soul bestows on me the only consolation I can now receive.”

Virginia bent over the exquisitely beautiful form of the kneeling countess, whose long black hair fell in disordered ringlets over her snowy bosom and finely-turned shoulders. She beheld the scalding tears of *late* repentance stream from beneath the magic lid which veiled the jetty orb whose brilliancy dazzled, or whose syren softness still more endangered the peace of the beholder. She saw the imploring eyes of her brother bent on her, entreating her to spare him the agony of viewing the humble attitude of his soul's idol; she felt the weakness of human nature, unsupported by advice, example, and religion, and dropping on the neck of the supplicating countess, she mingled the tears of innocent affection, of guileless tenderness, with

with those of the weak, the guilty Isabella.

No entreaty, no argument made use of by Virginia, could induce lady Deterville to support an interview with Mrs. Herbert. Recovering by degrees her composure, she lavished every grateful epithet on Virginia, and turning towards her lover, expressed her readiness to undertake the voyage, if possible, next day. To this he objected, fearing that her health was not sufficiently re-established; but at length he yielded to her wishes, as well as to the entreaties of his sister.

Mrs. Herbert, from motives of delicacy, forbore to press the subject of an interview with the countess. She saw the necessary preparations for the departure of her son with melancholy silence. She dreaded his stay, yet she lamented the necessity of his absence; while he, grateful for her goodness, penitent for his fault, though still idolizing the cause,

gave to his mother and sister every moment of his time that he could spare from his Isabella.

At length the painful hour of parting came. It was agreed that lord de Morville and his companion should set out by break of day, in a hired carriage, attended by Dawson and one of his lordship's female domestics, who was to wait on the countess; that they should be followed at a distance by one of his confidential servants out of livery, who was to see them safely embarked, and then return, with the joyful intelligence of their safety, to Mrs. Herbert and Virginia.

When lord de Morville took leave of his mother and sister, he thought it the most trying moment of his life. Again and again he embraced them—again he returned to kiss off the tears of his sister. He fancied that her pulse was higher than usual—that her fair cheek displayed the hectic flush of concealed disorder; he

he thought of the singular circumstance which she had mentioned to him of the supernatural appearance of Marian Glendore, and of the mystery couched within her words. Should any thing happen to her during his absence—should this be the last time of their meeting! the thought was agony. It had power to melt him to all a woman's weakness, and again he pressed her to his bosom—"Dearest sister," said his lordship, "I leave you to the protecting care of our beloved mother, and to the honourable affection of my noble friend. My imprudence prevents my bestowing on him your hand; let him therefore receive it earlier than he would have done, had I remained in England."

Virginia faintly smiled through her tears; but her heart was too full to reply. She saw the door close which shut him from her sight, and resolved, notwithstanding her increasing indisposition, to behold him once again before he

left the castle. Pain of body and agitation of mind kept her from sleeping, and she stole softly, before the break of day, to the chamber of her brother. It was, however, empty: the dear-loved criminal had flown with his fair prize, and Virginia, disappointed and grieved, flung herself on the vacant bed.

Short and disturbed were her slumbers. In imagination she beheld the guilty fugitives, as they had reached the termination of the chesnut avenue. She saw sir David Montgomery rush from behind a tree; the carriage stopped—her brother descended—the shriek of Isabella pierced her soul—she started from the bed, and scarce knowing what she did, flew down stairs.

Virginia, still under the influence of her dream, and careless of the keen air of a winter morning, which blew fresh upon her thin-clad form, with hurried steps proceeded to the avenue which led to the high road. A scream of agony met
her

her ear—"Oh Heaven, my brother!" she exclaimed, and darted down the path.

The faint streaks of light now visible in the east enabled Virginia to perceive distinctly the figures of sir David Montgomery and lord de Morville in the attitude of taking aim. Virginia sprang forward just as her brother had fired in the air, she caught the upraised arm of sir David, who, turning fiercely round, beheld the pale, exhausted form of her he loved, as she sunk at his feet, imploring his mercy for the man who had so deeply injured him. Her hands clasped his knees—her fine eyes were raised to his in all the eloquence of entreaty—"Spare but the life of my brother——" she paused from excessive terror, yet still her speaking eyes implored the generous lenity of sir David.

The brother of lady Deterville could not behold unmoved the lovely suppliant. He felt her frame tremble, even to agony; he saw the chill breeze beat

against her bosom, and fan the disorder-
 ed tresses of her uncovered head. Re-
 sentment subsided, and tenderness took
 possession of his heart. He stooped to
 raise her from the ground; the sweet
 voice of mercy stole into the ear of Vir-
 ginia; she pressed the hand of sir David
 to her lips. It was the only exertion
 she was capable of making, to prove her
 gratitude; her spirits sunk beneath the
 conflict of her feelings, and she fell life-
 less into his arms.

Alarmed at her situation, and terri-
 fied by the deathlike paleness of her
 countenance, sir David looked around
 for assistance, but no soul was near. The
 countess had taken advantage of the
 yielding features of her brother, and ac-
 tually forced lord de Morville into the
 carriage, consoling him with the assu-
 rance, that he had done enough to prove
 his courage; and that sir David would
 not be able to resist the persuasions of
 Virginia. Locked in the arms of the
 countess,

countess, the agitated de Morville suffered himself to be guided by her, who he felt had now the greatest right to his life, since, if deprived of his protection, what might be her fate!

Sir David was too deeply interested in the recovery of Virginia, even to feel a wish to pursue the fugitives. Besides, had he not whispered to her that her petition was granted? Fearing lest the cold should retard her recovery, he stripped off his coat, and flung it over her; then raising her light form in his arms, he bore her rapidly towards the castle.

Virginia drew a stifled sigh of returning animation; she opened her heavy eyes—she beheld her mother, who was chafing her temples with anxious solicitude, while sir David knelt before her, watching, with compassionate tenderness, her temporary oblivion—“ My brother! my dear brother!” murmured Virginia.

“ He is safe, my darling child,” cried

Mrs. Herbert. “ Sir David Montgomery has proved himself one of the noblest of human beings. For your sake he has consented to restrain his just displeasure—for your sake he has promised to spare the life of my beloved but imprudent son.”

A deep blush overspread the manly features of sir David; he pressed with respectful tenderness the hand of Virginia—“ Fear not, too lovely pleader,” said he, “ the continuation of my anger. When I met de Morville, my soul was full of resentment for the injury I had sustained. When I saw *you*—when I heard *you* beg his life, how could I refuse a request of *yours*—how could I do otherwise than accede to *your* wishes?”

‘The rush of joy, of gratitude, which filled the heart of Virginia, gave her momentary strength. She pressed the hand of sir David fervently to her lips—“ Bless you! oh bless you, sir David!” said she, in a tremulous voice; “ may
this

this act of noble self-denial, of generous compassion, plead for you at the throne of Mercy, should you ever stand in need of Heaven's forgiveness! The prayers of a tender mother, of a grateful sister, will follow you through life."

She now appeared to be again fainting, and Mrs. Herbert, greatly alarmed, requested sir David to become her amanuensis, and to send off an express to her son-in-law and Mrs. Meredith, while she supported her trembling child to her chamber.

The interest which sir David took in the fate of Virginia induced him to remain at the castle until he could be assured of her recovery. He dispatched a servant with letters to London, and sent another to the next town for medical advice, until a physician could be procured from town. In short, Mrs. Herbert found his presence of essential service to her until the arrival of her son-in-law; and though deeply afflicted by
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the relapse of Virginia, yet she did not fail to remember the debt of gratitude which she owed him.

The same carriage brought Herbert, Mrs. Meredith, Winifred, and sir H. Melford, on whose physical skill Arthur placed the firmest reliance. The acuteness of his feelings would not permit him to attend to formalities; he flew to the chamber of Virginia—he called on her name—he kissed her burning lips and crimson cheek—but she knew him not. The violence of the fever had disordered her intellects, yet she raved of Marian Glendore, and of lord de Morville, till the complete exhaustion of her bodily powers silenced for a time her incoherent ravings, and she sunk into temporary insensibility.

Herbert, in a state of mind bordering on distraction, inquired the opinion of sir Henry, who, though accustomed to witness a variety of painful scenes in the course of his profession, felt a high degree

gree of interest for his youthful patient, and for those connected with her. He took the hand of Herbert, and pressing it with friendly kindness, said—"To deceive you, my dear sir, would be cruel in the extreme, as it would only sharpen the severity of the blow."

"My God!" exclaimed Arthur, interrupting him hastily, "do you then think her in absolute danger? Oh, sir Harry, save her life, I conjure you; restore her to health, and all I possess is yours."

"All that human aid can perform shall be done," replied the physician; "but the constitution of lady Virginia has been terribly shaken by her former illness, and by the constant irritation of her feelings. She had not sufficiently recovered to be able to bear the consequences of her exposure to the cold air of the morning; and her fears for lord de Morville, together with her sudden assurance of his safety, has operated too powerfully on her nervous system. It
has

has brought on a fever, which in less than eight hours must decide——”

A deep groan from his agonized hearer made sir Harry pause. To attempt to console a man who was on the point of losing all he loved dearest on earth, he knew to be fruitless. Consolation, in such a case, must come alone from Heaven.

Mrs. Herbert and Winifred could not be prevailed on to leave, for a moment, the bedside of Virginia; while Mrs. Meredith's affection for her young charge even conquered her natural aversion to a sick-room, and she occasionally exposed herself to it; while Herbert took his station in the antichamber, next to that which contained his bride.

With mute attention each individual counted the minutes until they approached the eighth hour. Virginia slept, and the fond mother, the adoring lover, and the faithful friend, as they hung round her bed, each separately offered

ferred up their prayers to Heaven that her slumbers might terminate favourably.

She awoke, and casting her eyes around, smiled sweetly on beholding by whom she was thus kindly attended. She motioned for her mother to support her head, which she did on her bosom, while Arthur held her hand fast locked in his.

A faint glow of pleasure tinged the cheek of Virginia, as she raised his hand to her lips; then clasping it to her heart, she said in a faint voice—"How languidly it beats, my Arthur! but it is all your own. Had it pleased Heaven to have united our hands, circumstances might have lessened your affection, or weakened mine. You might have discovered failings in the wife which you were blind to in the mistress. These might have led you to regret our marriage, and the ORIGINAL of your treasured

sured MINIATURE would have been miserable for life."

Herbert cast on her a look of tender reproach; but his voice failed him; his throat was full.

"I know what you would say, my Arthur; you would tell me that a love like yours could never alter. You think so now; so do I, with respect to mine; but the undisguised freedom of the married state might change our opinions. The least alteration from passionate tenderness to chilling indifference, would be felt by me as the severest stroke from Heaven. Perhaps, under the circumstances in which we are placed, my Arthur, I might have fancied an alteration in your manners, which would have been equally fatal to my peace. Heaven has thought fit to prevent the possibility of this calamity, by removing me from a world in which, had I continued to live, I should have met with many instances of censure and unkind reproach."

Arthur

Arthur *felt* to what she alluded; but the idea of losing her became not the less insupportable. He could not restrain his tears; they fell on her hand; while the sobs of her mother and friends sensibly affected the lovely invalid.

“ Grieve not, my dearest mother, that your child will be saved from any future trials; that she is going to enjoy that happiness foretold by her sainted Marian. My dear brother, notwithstanding his recent conduct, will join with my Arthur in making amends for my loss. And you, my kind protectress, my adopted mother, rejoice that the daughter of your affection will be spared the temptations of vanity and extravagance; that she will be happy beyond the reach of disappointments. My kind Winifred, dry your tears, repress your sorrow, and give me one proof more of your love, by assisting to console my mother.”

Winifred stooped down to embrace
her

her dying friend. Virginia motioned to Mrs. Meredith, who sat almost stupified with grief. She came forward, and held her young favourite for a few minutes to her bosom, and then resigned her to her afflicted mother.

Virginia became visibly worse. She pressed her lips to those of her parent; then making the last effort of expiring nature, she turned towards the agonized Arthur; she essayed to speak; he rose, and bending over her, supported her in his arms. A heavenly smile irradiated her features—"My wish is granted," murmured Virginia, in a low, tremulous voice; "I die in the entire possession of my Arthur's heart—I die in his arms." Her head sunk on his bosom, and he pressed his lips to hers in an agony of fondness.

The tears of her lover once more recalled the fleeting spirits of Virginia; her eyes, now robbed of their sparkling brilliancy, were dimmed by the cold
hand

hand of death; yet they rested on the face of him she adored with lingering tenderness, till, starting suddenly, she pointed to the foot of the bed, and faintly articulating the name of Marian, breathed her last sigh on the bosom of her affianced husband.

It was many weeks before either Mrs. Herbert or Arthur could trust themselves to converse upon the severe loss which both had sustained. Time, which softens down the poignancy of most evils, seemed to have but little influence on their minds. Virginia's form, Virginia's features, were ever present to their view; and Arthur, who would not trust his cherished miniature one moment from his sight, employed a painter of the first eminence to paint several copies of it, under his immediate inspection, resolving that one of them should be placed in each of the principal rooms of Meredith House, which his mother had purchased of Mrs. Meredith, at the same time

time that she invited the old lady to take up her residence with her—a request to which she readily assented, as it not only enabled her to live rent free, but to let the cottage.

The only consolation which the parent and lover of Virginia now seem capable of receiving, arises from the scenery by which they are surrounded. Every spot is sanctified, as having once been dear to their lost Virginia. The lawn on which she danced—the shrubbery through which she ran, chasing with sportive gaiety the young Glendores—the bower of Marian, consecrated by her to her bosom's chosen friend, all are sacred to him who feels that the wide world does not contain a second Virginia.

No consideration has been able to draw him from the retirement to which he has consigned himself since the death of the lovely ORIGINAL of his MINIATURE. Not all the persuasions of his sister,

sister, or the entreaties of Reuben, who felt *more* than he dared own even to himself, has had power to seduce the melancholy lover from what once was the home of his Virginia. A splendid monument has been erected in the village church, about a mile from Meredith House, to the memory of his beloved. It is here that her mortal remains were deposited, close to those of her beloved Marian. It is here that Herbert retires to weep unseen over what once had power to warm the coldest heart; and it is here that he has given orders to be buried, when his soul shall receive the long wished-for summons to join that of his idolized bride.

Two years have elapsed since the death of lady Virginia Sedley. The heart of Herbert rests in the grave of his beloved; yet he has obtained sufficient self-command to speak of her to those friends by whom she was considered as inestimable, and to talk of adopting the
infant

infant daughter of Dorinda, who, from tenderness to her brother, has called the child Virginia.

Lord de Morville has been for some months the guest of his mother, who, remembering the warm affection which subsisted between her lamented angel and her who is now the countess de Morville, kindly consented to receive her to her bosom. Nor has she had cause to regret her lenity; grateful, affectionate, domestic, and devoted to her husband and his family, the countess is among one of the few instances in life, of a woman, who, having deviated from virtue, becoming in other respects a being almost faultless. In the hearts of lord de Morville and his wife, Virginia will live for ever. Her memory can scarcely be more dear to Herbert than to them.

Mrs. Meredith has had one of her wishes accomplished; she has danced at the wedding of Winifred and Joseph Warburton; and actually yielding to the

the generous feeling of the moment, she made her niece a present of the immense sum of FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS, to purchase her bridal garments; promising, at the same time, that if she was a prudent, economical wife, she would not forget her in her will.

The cold and selfish heart of Mrs. Glendore felt a secret satisfaction at the death of her whom she always regarded as the rival to her favourite Alicia; but she no longer deceived herself with the vain hope of her becoming the wife of Herbert. The calm dignity of his grief, the steady uniformity of his conduct, his silent adoration of all that once belonged to Virginia, stamped with the seal of truth his vow of celibacy. The ambitious mother no longer saw in him the long-desired husband for her favourite; and Alicia felt that she had not only lost all chance of possessing the affection, but even the friendship of Herbert. She still remains the finished coquette—still

numbers on her list a train of admirers, who, dazzled by the brilliancy of her wit, and the elegance of her form, deem themselves happy to be admitted within the influence of her smiles.

No longer restrained by the desire of conforming to the taste of Herbert, Alicia has become one of Fashion's gayest votaries. With avidity she enters into every scene of dissipation, and courts the gaze of unlimited admiration. Even the praise of fools seems to have become necessary to the greedy ear of Alicia; and that vanity which in the young, inexperienced, and lovely Virginia, was a deadly sin, has now become the leading foible in the character of Alicia Glendore. The quickly-awakened feelings of conscience will often remind Alicia of unpleasant truths. Fancy will bring to her imagination the angel form of Virginia, the sunny smile, the laugh of unsuspecting innocence, the sparkling eye which made the heart glad to look on,

on, and, above all, the romantic tenderness which gave perfection to every object of its love.

It is then that Alicia shrinks from the remembrance of past events, and shudders at the thought of her own treachery. It is then that she plunges more deeply into all the various amusements of town, careless of the progress of that fatal disease which, while it heightens the bloom of beauty, secretly undermines the health of its victims, and which has been brought upon her by mental anguish and incessant dissipation.

Exiled from the presence of him she adores, Alicia roams from one scene to another, and “ finds in change of scene but change of pain.” The very name of her little niece, which has rendered the child doubly dear to its amiable father, conveys to Alicia only the sounds of reproach from which she vainly attempts to fly. Self-accused, she even

fears to encounter the mild eyes of Reuben, who, though deeply affected by the untimely death of her whom he had once considered as the destined partner of his days, has, nevertheless, acknowledged to Dorinda his firm belief that the keen sensibility of Virginia's nature, and her inherent delicacy of mind, would have united to render her happiness at best uncertain, since the unfortunate circumstance of her mother's divorce from lord de Morville, and marriage with governor Herbert, had certainly created an objection of the most delicate kind, which the world would have deemed a sufficient bar to her nuptials with Arthur.

Placed in a situation where the choice of two evils alone was allowed her, Virginia had either to brave the public censure, or resign the hand of a man to whom she was tenderly attached. The eloquence of love, and the pleadings of her own heart, made her prefer the former; yet she

she felt that she had not courage to encounter the voice of reproach, and therefore consented to become an alien from her native land, hoping by this to avoid the mortification she dreaded. Vain hope! The mind of Virginia was formed of materials too refined, too sensitive, to have been happy under the consciousness of having incurred the pity or the contempt of mankind. Had she lived, it is probable that the peculiar delicacy of her situation might have given rise to circumstances which would eventually have lessened her domestic comforts, if not finally destroyed them. In the hearts of those who loved her, Virginia can never die. To them the remembrance of her romantic tenderness, her innocent gaiety, her blooming beauty, is a constant source of melancholy, yet pleasing retrospection.

Time, which has mellowed the grief of lord de Morville, has not abated the poignancy of Herbert's. He has brought himself to talk of her with tolerable composure,

composure, but he still continues at Meredith House, proof against all the persuasions of Dorinda, who secretly cherishes the hope of seeing him one day or other enjoy the comforts of domestic happiness. But her hopes will never be fulfilled. The needle is not more constant to the pole, than is the soul of Herbert to the memory of his Virginia. To him the world is almost a blank—it does not contain a being capable of weakening the constancy of his attachment. He has devoted himself wholly to the remembrance of THE ORIGINAL OF HIS MINIATURE.

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